The Hudson Review

Winter 1995 $7 • $9 Can. • £5

Thomas M. Disch
The Castle of Indolence

Louis Simpson
These Sounds and This Movement

Alan Jacobs
Auden's Local Culture

David Mason
Auden Onstage

William H. Pritchard
Naipaul's Written World

POEMS BY James Laughlin, Patricia Goedicke, Miller Williams, Helen Conkling, Robert Hill Long

OZAWA HALL AT TANGLEWOOD BY Robert S. Clark

REVIEWS BY David Dooley, Gary Krist, Mark Jarman, Emily Grosholz, Harold Fromm, Thomas Filbin

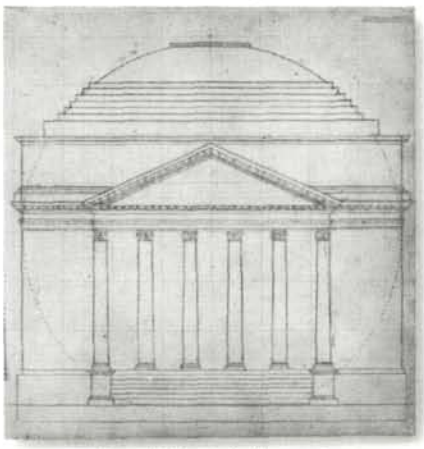
54>
0 73361 64805 1

A magazine of literature and the arts

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THOMAS JEFFERSON WISHED TO BE REMEMBERED MORE FOR THE FOUNDING OF A COLLEGE THAN THE FATHERING OF A COUNTRY.

On August 30, 1995, a country won't be founded, but a new college will. The Honors College at Adelphi in Garden City, 45 minutes from New York City. Its aim, like Jefferson's 200 years ago, is to prepare the next generation of leaders in government, science, the arts, the professions and business.



Jefferson's design for the library at the University of Virginia, circa 1817

Despite the portrayal of today's generation as subjects of circumstance rather than makers of history, we take an optimistic view. We have established the Honors College to ensure our students know they can be the best.

We believe we can accomplish this through a comprehensive education that will feature Adelphi's nationally recognized Core Curriculum; an Honors College program of studies built on a radical interpretation of the ideas that will take the Western tradition into the twenty-first century, helping to assure the vitality of our civilization; a Mentors Program that pairs each student with a distinguished faculty member as advisor and guide; and an Honors College Residence that creates an environment where students and faculty work and live side by side.

After four such intellectually charged years, graduates will, in the words of Adelphi's President, Peter Diamandopoulos, *"possess the qualities that will prove crucial in the coming decades: intellectual discernment, sound judgment, unrestricted imagination and moral courage."*

Qualities that can only give our Honors College students, and with them our nation, a very good shot at life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in the 21st century.

A Commitment to Intellect

THE HONORS COLLEGE AT ADELPHI
FOUNDED 1995 NEW YORK

For more information on the Honors College at Adelphi or to schedule a meeting with Dean Richard Keith Garner, call 1-800-ADELPHI. In Queens, Nassau and Suffolk Counties, call 516-877-3050.

©1994. Adelphi University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLAREMONT UNIVERSITY
MILLS COLLEGE
CALIFORNIA

New from Massachusetts

JAN 18 1995
FAY G. ALLEN LIBRARY
PERIODICALS

Playing It by Ear
Literary Essays and Reviews
William H. Pritchard

"A witty, stylish, and remorselessly knowing critic, William Pritchard belongs in the heady company of Mencken, Edmund Wilson, and Randall Jarrell. . . . *Playing It by Ear* is a splendid miscellany that shows off Pritchard at his best."—Jay Parini

$16.95 paper, $45.00 cloth

CLAREMONT UNIVERSITY
MILLS COLLEGE
CALIFORNIA

Remembering Elizabeth Bishop
An Oral Biography
Gary Fountain & Peter Brazeau
Afterword by Bonnie Costello

JAN 18 1995
FAY G. ALLEN LIBRARY
PERIODICALS

"A multivocal treatment well suited to the complex and dappled life of one of America's premier modern poets. . . . The portrait of the poet this oral biography creates is . . . absorbing and at times beautiful and graced with artfulness."—*Kirkus Reviews*

$35.00 cloth, illus.

The White Logic
Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction
John W. Crowley

"An excellent study of modernist American fiction from the perspective of American drinking practices and addiction theory. Crowley mixes biography, literary reading, and social and cultural history into a very smooth cocktail, and the result is illuminating and invigorating."—Marty Roth

$14.95 paper, $40.00 cloth

The Education of Mrs. Henry Adams
Eugenia Kaledin
Second edition with a new preface

"The book is superb, and much needed. The only feminist interpretation of an increasingly controversial life and marriage, it will be widely assigned in women's studies and U.S. history and literature courses."—Blanche Wiesen Cook

$15.95 paper, illus.

University of Massachusetts Press
Box 429 Amherst, MA 01004
MasterCard/VISA 413-545-2219 Fax 413-545-1226

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

VOLUME XLVII NUMBER 4 WINTER 1995

ESSAYS

The Castle of Indolence	THOMAS M. DISCH	521
Auden's Local Culture	ALAN JACOBS	543
Auden Onstage	DAVID MASON	569
Naipaul's Written World	WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD	587

POETRY

These Sounds and This Movement (*Translations from Valery Larbaud*)	LOUIS SIMPSON	533
Lay of the Badde Wyf; Clutter of Silence (Invention for Two Voices); A Tenth Anniversary Photograph, 1952; Living Will; On the Sacrifice of a Siamese Twin at Birth	MILLER WILLIAMS	582
The Search; De Contemptu Mortis	JAMES LAUGHLIN	597
Hero	PATRICIA GOEDICKE	599
Diaspora	ROBERT HILL LONG	602
The Oboe Teacher; The Soul of a Dead Bat	HELEN CONKLING	605
Sourwood Nocturne	FLOYD SKLOOT	608

CHRONICLES

Theatre *Exciting productions at the Guthrie Theatre*	RICHARD HORNBY	609
Film *"The Remains of the Day"*	BERT CARDULLO	616
Art I *"Origins of Impressionism" at the Met; surprising finds in the South*	JOHN LOUGHERY	623

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art II — CARL PFLUGER — 629
The views and visions of Thomas Cole
Music — ROBERT S. CLARK — 636
Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood

REVIEWS
Shifting Sands: *The Columbia History of American Poetry* — MARK JARMAN — 641
A new history of American poetry edited by Jay Parini
Making a Scene — THOMAS FILBIN — 648
Thomas Rayfiel, Robert Hellenga, James Carroll, etc.
A Thunder of Hooves in the Drawing Room — GARY KRIST — 655
"Excursions in the Real World: Memoirs," by William Trevor
Love and the Creation of Value — EMILY GROSHOLZ — 661
"The Pursuit of Love," by Irving Singer
Cracked Thinking — HAROLD FROMM — 667
"Dogmatic Wisdom," by Russell Jacoby
Poetic Integrity — DAVID DOOLEY — 673
Geoffrey Hill, William Stafford, John Ashbery, etc.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS — 682

INDEX TO VOLUME XLVII — 685

TO OUR READERS

Publication of this issue of THE HUDSON REVIEW is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., a Federal Agency, and by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts. We wish to express our appreciation to these organizations for their generosity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS: Paula Deitz, Frederick Morgan

MANAGING EDITOR: Ronald Koury

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Nicholas Cheonis

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Sarah M. Bright

ADVISORY EDITORS: Hayden Carruth, William H. Pritchard, Frederick Brown, Sonya Rudikoff, Dean Flower, Emily Grosholz, Dana Gioia, Gary Krist

ASSOCIATE: Vincent M. Macchia

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Marcia B. Siegel *(Dance)*, Robert S. Clark *(Music)*, Richard Hornby *(Theatre)*, Bert Cardullo *(Film)*, John Loughery *(Art)*

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10021. It is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index and in the American Humanities Index. Book reviews are indexed in Book Review Index, and poems in Index of American Periodical Verse.

Individual subscription $24.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $28.00. Single copy $7.00. Special rate for bulk orders. U. S. A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior Street, Sandusky, Ohio 44870. Telephone orders for retail and wholesale distribution: 1-800-221-3148. Library subscriptions in England: Periodicals Division, B. H. Blackwell Ltd., P. O. Box 40, Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XLIV available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I—XLIV available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. We handle directly all requests for permission to photocopy.

We urge individual and library subscribers to inform us promptly of address changes to insure the continuity of their subscriptions. Claims for missing issues will not be considered after six months from date of publication. We regret that we cannot provide refunds on canceled subscriptions.

Unsolicited mss will be read according to the following schedule: *Nonfiction*: January 1 through March 31, and October 1 through December 31; *Poetry*: April 1 through September 30; *Fiction*: June 1 through November 30. Unsolicited mss received at other times will be returned unread. Manuscripts submitted by subscribers who so identify themselves will be read throughout the year. Manuscripts will not be returned nor will inquiries be answered unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editors.

Printed in the United States of America. Second Class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE HUDSON REVIEW, 684 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021. Registered U. S. Patent Office.

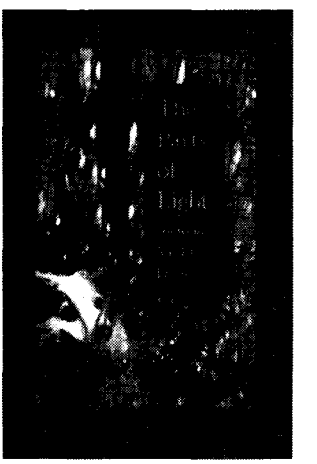
Copyright © 1995 by The Hudson Review, Inc. ISSN 0018-702X

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHNS HOPKINS: POETRY AND FICTION
JOHN T. IRWIN, GENERAL EDITOR

The Parts of Light

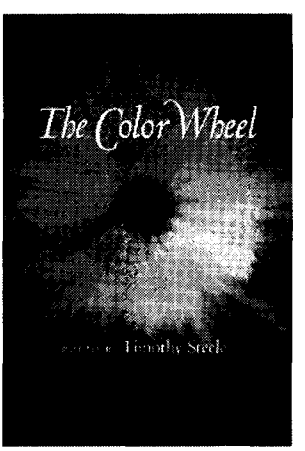
VICKI HEARNE



"Hearne's poems demand participation, refuse enjoyment.... She recognizes that an animal's union of body and spirit, and radical unself-consciousness, represent a quiet, humble superiority over humankind."
—*Publishers Weekly*

"There is a sense of real excitement in reading Hearne's best poems—the excitement of seeing the familiar world from an entirely fresh perspective."—Dana Gioia, *Hudson Review*, reviewing her earlier work

$12.95 paperback



The Color Wheel

TIMOTHY STEELE

"The reader who appreciates fine formal poetry will watch Steele's development with keen attention. Whatever he has yet to do, Steele has already left his mark."—X. J. Kennedy, *DLB*

"No younger poet now writing in America uses the traditional resources of poetry more skillfully than Timothy Steele."—*Threepenny Review*

$12.95 paperback

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Hampden Station, Baltimore, Maryland 21211
To order, call 1-800-537-5487.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW DIRECTIONS
RECENT REVIVED MODERN CLASSICS

ALFRED ANDERSCH

EFRAIM'S BOOK. Trans. by Ralph Manheim. "The myth of German fate is parodied by the narrator's belief that the Holocaust was a matter of chance rather than destiny. His multi-layered autobiographical narrative, sparked by a visit he makes to Berlin 27 years after he left, opens his eyes to human culpability.... *Efraim's Book* is about the vital role the imagination plays in Germany's unending struggle to come to terms with the past in order not to repeat it. Masterful." — *The Boston Phoenix Literary Section.* $11.95 pbk.

EÇA DE QUEIROS

THE ILLUSTRIOUS HOUSE OF RAMIRES. Trans. by Anne Stevens, intro.by V.S. Pritchett. ★ "Slyly funny and richly detailed, this reissue of Quierós's long out-of-print book makes for a delicious introduction to Portugal's greatest novelist. " — *Publishers Weekly.* "An utter delight. " —*The Glasgow Herald* "There is nothing old-fashioned about this particular classic, exept for its appealingly sensuous fin-de-siecle tone." —*Washington Post Book World.* $14.95 pbk.

HENRY JAMES

THE SACRED FOUNT. Introductory essays by Leon Edel and R.P. Blackmur. "As a 'high application of the intelligence,' *The Sacred Fount* is to be cherished and studied." —Leon Edel. "*The Sacred Fount* has a relish of detail, a passion of attentiveness, a specific pride of free achievement [and an] unassailable mastery.... The essential tour de force of James's sensibility." —R.P.Blackmur. $10.95 pbk.(*Jan.*)

STEVIE SMITH

NOVEL ON YELLOW PAPER. "This witty and admittedly autobiographical work is ostensibly the ruminations of Pompey Casmilus....encompass[ing] 'damp' Victorian novels, sex and Saint Anthony, and the emerging evils of Nazism.... Readers will find it hard to forget this character." —*Belles Lettres* "...giddily voracious parable of the wild life circa 1930." —*Voice Lit. Supp.* "Note that a limited number of copies will be reprinted on yellow paper." —*Lib. Jrnl.* $10.95 pbk.

MURIEL SPARK

THE COMFORTERS. "In it a writer and Catholic convert begins hearing voices that make her realize she is a fictional character herself. The book 'adds to the growing evidence that Kingsley Amis and other members of the "couldn't-care-less" school of writers are not the only lively force in British fiction today,' Aileen Pippett said in *The New York Times* in 1957." —*The N.Y. Times Book Rev.*(1994). "Her many fans will be happy to see this again." —*Lib. Jrnl.* $10.95 pbk.

Please send for complete catalog

NEW DIRECTIONS 80 Eighth Avenue, NYC 10011

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STORY LINE PRESS

The Independent Press for the Independent Mind.

THE KING MY FATHER'S WRECK

A MEMOIR BY LOUIS SIMPSON

"Simpson's insistent voice gives his self-portrait a more dramatic emotional topography than most, mingling outrage with regret and celebration as moods and themes. He is never not himslef, and that self is full of temperament, rewarding adventurous readers."

—*Publishers Weekly*

220 pgs, 6 x 9, Paper $14.95, ISBN 0-934257-32-9, Cloth $24.95, ISBN – 09-4

ROBINSON JEFFERS:
POET OF CALIFORNIA

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

A BIOGRAPHY BY JAMES KARMAN

"Karman's book is insightful, clear, and written out of an obvious love for both Jeffers and his work. This love does not make him subjective; rather, it seems to give him a kind of scholarly precision and attention to detail..."

—*American Book Review*

"Karman's telling and testing of Jeffers' successes and failures make for engrossing reading."

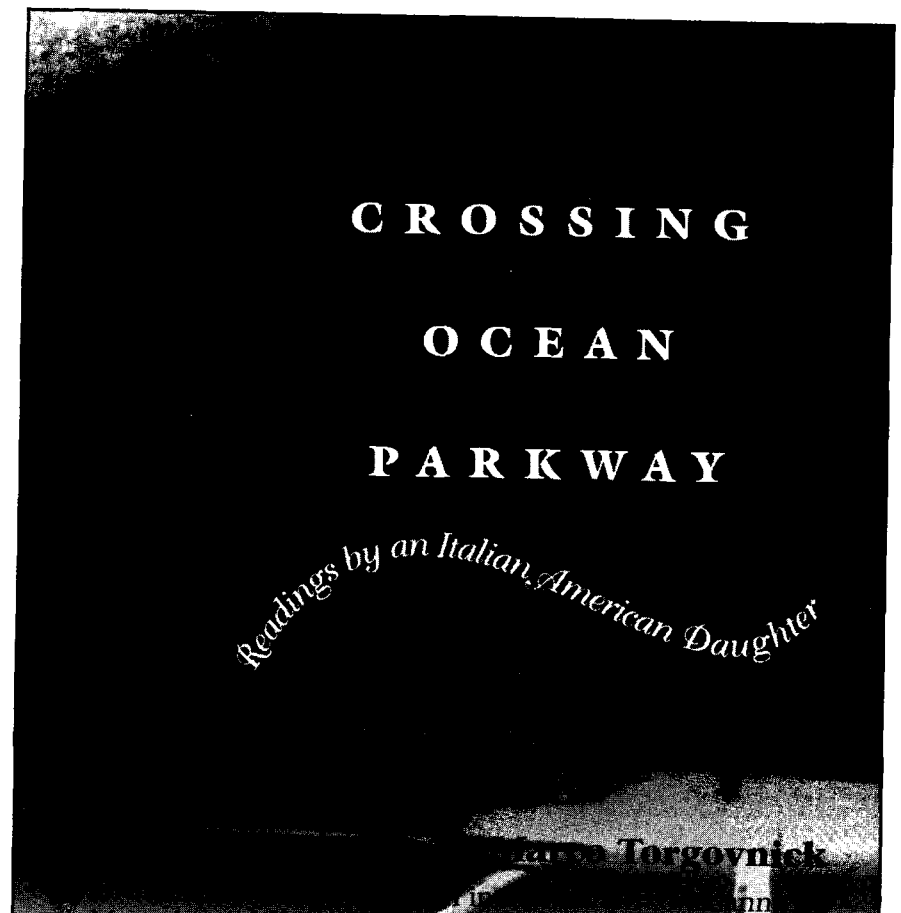
—*The Bloomsbury Review*

184 pgs, 6 x 9, Paper $12.00, ISBN 0-934257-58-2

WRITE OR CALL FOR A COMPLETE CATALOG:

STORY LINE PRESS
Three Oaks Farm
Brownsville, OR 97327-9718
tel (503) 466-5352 / fax (503) 466-3200

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Torgovnick

Marco longed for college, culture, and upward mobility. This book is Torgovnick's unflinching account of crossing cultural boundaries in American life, of what it means to be an Italian American woman who became a scholar and literary critic.

"A brave, enlightening, compassionate and beautifully written work in a new genre—the memoir evoked through a prism of sharply analytic critical theory."—Joyce Carol Oates

"A book to cherish."—Elaine Showalter

"Torgovnick's scholarly background and life experience inform her readings of both American culture and her own past; she has found an essayist's voice that is very much her own."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

Cloth • $22.50 • 192 pages

Available at bookstores or from:

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
5801 S. Ellis Ave., Chicago, IL 60637

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THOMAS M. DISCH

The Castle of Indolence

For most readers, from those of highest brow to out-and-out bibliobulimics, contemporary poetry might as well not exist. They don't read it and are not curious about it. These same readers might well have a fair amount of poetry on their bookshelves, ranging from translations of Homer and Dante to the last generation of high modernists—Bishop, Berryman, Lowell. There might be a copy of the City Lights edition of *Howl*, and something by Sylvia Plath. Poets who have endorsed the public's estimate of their art by their own suicides, after long threatening such a stroke of poetic justice in their writing, generally seem to have made the most significant dent on the Collective Consciousness.

That poetry has lost most of its audience and much of its cachet is not an original observation. In 1988 Joseph Epstein published an essay in *Commentary*, "Who Killed Poetry?," in which he expressed his across-the-board dismay at the condition of the art he'd once loved but which seemed now aesthetically impoverished and unworthy of serious intellectual attention. He blamed the system of creative writing programs for fostering a closed-shop mentality among poets. In 1990 Dana Gioia's "Can Poetry Matter?" appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, ruffling many of the same feathers within the poetry subculture.

Gioia is a poet himself, who reads and reviews widely. As a critic, he has been a fervent champion of many of his peers. Poetry clearly does matter for him. Yet his essay was even more damning than Epstein's, being based on a real familiarity with the work that Epstein had dismissed, unread, as being unreadable. Gioia cites the 1985 *Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets* as a symptomatic example of the system at work. "Running nearly 800 pages, the volume presents no fewer than 104 important young poets, virtually all of whom teach creative writing." A capable bibliographer might well ferret out 104 other recent anthologies published in the last two decades, all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

assembled on the same editorial principle that governs the Morrow anthology (according to Gioia): the need for authenticating publication, a need that the poets in universities now share with other academics if they are to win tenure.

That most poets should be anxious to publish their poems, and that mediocre poets should feel a special anxiety in this regard, is not to be wondered at. When not only one's reputation but one's salary is at stake, the ante is upped exponentially, and all the decorums of publishing, reviewing, and valorizing poetry reflect the wagon-circling wariness of poetry professionals. It is thought bad form to review one's peers other than applausively. Many poets, therefore, refuse the task of reviewing altogether, or else make it known beforehand that they will only review books they are certain they can praise.

Prize-giving and related perks are administered in the manner of children's birthday parties, so that no poet must leave the party empty-handed. In England, laureates are laureates for life. In America, there is a new laureate each year—not only nationally, but state by state. Laurels, after all, are cheap. Even so, it is a rare poet who doesn't glory in his garlands in public like a Ruritanian generalissimo. In a recent press release from The Academy of American Poets, the three judges of the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize are to be seen sporting no less than twelve awards and fellowships among themselves, "including," the release notes of the jury's chair "the Bernard F. Conners Award from *The Paris Review* and Melville Cane Award from the Poetry Society of America." I would wager that the juries for *those* awards, the enablers of their fellowships, and the poets who commended them to the university writing programs that employ them are all as liberally belaureled.

Theoretically—and, indeed, empirically—a case can be made that there ought to be more first-class poets at the present than in earlier centuries. There are, after all, many more people, and more of them receive an education that could expose them to the possibility of poetry. There are all those workshops, throughout the country, which every year award diplomas to a new cohort of M.F.A.'s, among whom some significant percentage should have what it takes.

Whether or not workshops are, in fact, the most fertile grounds for the breeding of good poetry, I think that the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twentieth century has produced a bumper crop of excellent to world-class poets in America, and that if one were to compile an equivalent anthology of their best poems as judiciously comprehensive as that which John Hollander selected for The Library of America's anthology of nineteenth-century American poetry, it might well extend to seven or eight volumes as bulky as Hollander's pair. Not a few of this little multitude might be poets even now entering their prime. But—here I share Epstein's misgivings—I think the great preponderance of the best poetry of this century was written before our present laureate (Rita Dove, born in 1952) had indited her first poem to paper.

And for this simple reason—that the workshops, which have a monopoly on the training of poets, encourage indolence, incompetence, smugness, and—most perniciously—that sense of victimization and special entitlement that poets have now come to share with other artists who depend on government or institutional patronage to sustain their art, pay their salaries, and provide free vacations.

Let me deal with these in order. Laziness is, on the whole, not a bad thing for poets. Some of the best—Emerson, Whitman—have gloried in their indolence, from a Zen-like sense that good poems as often have their source in a chance encounter with a songbird as from the diligent pursuit of epic significance. Idle hands can be the Muse's workshop, as well as the Devil's. The pillowy borderland between our dreams and our daily routines can be a marvelously fertile soil for poetry.

James Thomson, who wrote the mock epic whose title I have here purloined for my own use, commends the "pleasing land of drowsyhead" both for its genial, non-competitive ambience—

> Here naught but candour reigns, indulgent ease,
> Good-natured lounging, sauntering up and down:
> They who are pleased themselves must always please;
> On others' ways they never squint a frown.

and for its spiritual benefits—

> The best of men have ever loved repose:
> They hate to mingle in the filthy fray;
> Where the soul sours, and gradual rancour grows,
> Imbittered more from peevish day to day.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thomson was being playful in these verses, but not sarcastic. His allegorical castle is a group portrait of his own circle of friends and fellow-poets. In one stanza Thomson portrays himself as the arch-layabout:

> A bard here dwelt, more fat than bard beseems;
> Who, void of envy, guile, and lust of gain,
> On virtue still, and nature's pleasing themes,
> Poured forth his unpremeditated strain. . . .

Later, in another celebration of the spirit of Lazy Fair, Shelley echoes Thomson, in praising the blithe skylark that pours out his heart "in profuse strains of unpremeditated art." From Shelley it is but a stone's skip across the Atlantic to Emerson, with his lavish praise of the Aeolian Harp (celebrated in Thomson's poem, as well), that trope for the poet's responsive soul—and infallible first drafts.

And truly, there is no other form of writing that *feels* so good as a lyric poem as it gushes forth in a steady flow. If that metaphor rubs you the wrong way; if you would at once insist that poetry is Hard Work and not a luxury product for intellectual sybarites; if poetry suggests to you the possibility of a Seriousness higher than prose rather than the possibility of sheer music—then nature did not intend you for a poet.

All this praise of laziness and going with the flow comes with one large proviso: the soil must have been prepared, the harp tuned, the fingers schooled. Then careless raptures may sound more like Liszt than listlessness. It should also be noted that the laziness of genius may seem, at lower altitudes, a great deal like exertion. George Eliot, for entertainment in her declining years, liked to read aloud from Dante. Auden vacationed in Iceland and learned the language in the spirit of an intellectual alpinist. It was there, so why not climb it? For such spirits, schools are superfluous.

This is not an argument for shutting down all poetry workshops and bankrupting the industry, since the object of those workshops—especially at an undergraduate level—has never been to produce a greater abundance of professional poets for the world to ignore. The workshops have a humbler mission, one not unlike university sports departments: they promote a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sense of confidence and self-esteem. Playing football or basketball can be a source of great personal satisfaction, provided one is matched against players of comparable incompetence; so, too, with poetry. The workshops can't make Miltons out of the tin-eared, but they can instill those simple skills of impassioned self-expression that once were learned in classes of Rhetoric and Elocution—skills that should be cultivated by anyone with a sense that a gift of gab might be his or her meal ticket: teachers, ministers, salesmen, anchorwomen, and all other would-be retainers of the Castle of Indolence.

Beyond that, the workshops often allow students to get a high grade with minimum exertion. What better way to compensate for the demands of Organic Chemistry than to twang the lyre? Few teachers give grades lower than B's so long as one produces the negligible amount of work required. The reading burden is minimal, and there are no finals. Further, the actual classes tend to be entertaining, since most workshop instructors are skilled flâneurs, and many even possess the gifts of astrologers and tarot readers, who, from the evidences of a few cards on the table, can flatter their guileless customers into the delusion that they really might be poets.

With all this going for them, the poetry workshops can hold their own against most of the competing liberal arts departments and are in no grave danger of being disestablished, especially at a time when Theory has taken over graduate English departments, where it was once possible to study poetry in a serious way.

But what if one actually wants to learn to write poetry? There the workshops will offer little assistance. For the work that a neophyte poet must set his mind to is often tiresome and even demeaning. Most of the great English poets learned their craft in the course of studying Latin and Greek, and translating their hexameters and dithyrambs into a semblance of English verse. The object of their study was never to produce poetry but to subject impressionable minds to the most rigorous discipline then imaginable. A punishment as cruel then as now it is unusual—but it worked. At least, in those cases which we have record of, in the annals of English poetry, up to and including Auden.

Contrast to this what a workshop instructor is likely to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

encounter among today's students. No Latin, no Greek, and probably no other foreign language in working order. (I have only high school Latin, crossword-puzzle Greek, and my command of other modern languages is at hunt-and-peck level, so I don't speak from any loftier vantage point.) That is to say, no sense of language as an alien, mysterious, and yet systematic entity. No sense of grammar or syntax that is not sheer intuition. No sense of the history embedded in their own tongue. Even in their own language they will have read only a smattering of its classics, and they will have been taught to dismiss most of that as fusty, patristic, and irrelevant—postcards from Tintern Abbey.

Concerning "Tintern Abbey," the poem, an academic theorist, Marjorie Levinson, has written in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* that "the literatures of the past, if left to themselves, confront us as despotic structures," which are best dealt with by reading them "tendentiously—for ourselves." Reading "Tintern Abbey" in this spirit, she faults Wordsworth for ignoring the beggars in the neighborhood of the ruined Abbey, whom she, with the hindsight of 150 years now rescues from Wordsworth's marginalization. In hypothesizing these ideal Victorian victims, homeless yet within the shadow of a great poem, Levinson uses a familiar ploy of theorists, setting against the actual body of literature the eloquent silences of various huddled masses whom history has scanted. The record of the past becomes a chorus of Baskerville hounds, significant for their not barking. Justice is done, while at the same time drastically simplifying the curriculum. Why bother with dead white males when there are so many living poets who share Levinson's more enlightened sense of the world the dead bards so systematically misrepresented?

In this devaluation of the past, academic theorists offer aid and comfort to the indolence of the workshops, where the poetry that is studied is, by and large, the poetry that is written there—by fellow students, by their instructors, and by those with whom their instructors network, poets visiting to give a reading. This is only natural, from a careerist point of view. Those who are not in the workshops just for an easy credit must soon acquire a sense of what is expected of a poet at entry level, and that is what the workshops teach. If that amounts to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mediocrity, so much the better. Mediocrity is easier to emulate than excellence, which is usually, sad to say, inimitable.

So much for *laziness* and its twin brother, *incompetence*, along with it. The *smugness* of such poets, unschooled and unskilled, is the fruit of their parochial existence, where the talk is mostly of friends and family, the weather, and how one is feeling today. Unread by any but their friends and unchastened by any kind of criticism, the poets of the workshops can take themselves at their own, always high, estimation. When another estimation shatters their solitude, their astonishment is equal to their indignation. Being accredited poets, they know themselves to be above reproach: their hearts are pure, and they wear them on their sleeves. For if the workshops have taught them nothing else (which is usually the case), they do know that if they have written what they really, really feel, it's poetry and, as such, beyond odious comparisons.

Poetry workshops often serve as a kind of group therapy of the sort that promotes empowerment, with lots of hugs for those assembled and a chance to berate the group's enemies. The rhetorical strategy favored by the newly empowered is usually shouting, and its poetic equivalent, rant. Ginsberg's popularity among neophyte poets is due to his being an accomplished ranter, poetry's own Axl Rose, someone who is willing to let it all hang out.

Apprentice poets, once they've developed sufficient self-esteem, quickly graduate to self-reverence—a tendency that has its complement in the self-protective contempt that adolescents feel for the oppressive vistas of history and the intricate machineries of the world they never made.

The most benign form of smugness is that which dotes upon family snapshots. If there's nothing else happening in one's life, there are always births to be celebrated, deaths to be mourned, spouses to cherish, and skeletons to be exhumed from closets. Now, it would be a peculiar poet who *never* adverted to his or her Significant Others in his verse; who did not, indeed, often feel it incumbent to do so. But in the workshops (and not the poetry workshops alone) this theme has become all-pervasive. "Write what you know," the students are told, and what else do they know? Where else have they been, usually, except at home or at school? If their aim is to be graduated directly into the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

professoriate and if they succeed, they may preserve their inexperience intact well into middle age or beyond, and they will write, as well or ill as their talents admit, about their domesticities.

A large life is by no means a guarantor of large poetry. Between the antipodes of a war-correspondent-cum-poet like James Fenton and a recluse like Emily Dickinson the spectrum of first-rate poets is continuous, but even the quietest and most cloistered poet can, with Pegasus assisting, adventure over a broader imaginative terrain than the family chroniclers of the workshops. This being said, experience of the wider world does tend to affect poets like Miracle-Gro. Witness all the poems that get written on vacation—not necessarily because the poet has more leisure, but because he is being bombarded with new information. Poets ritually deplore the world being too much with us, the getting and the spending, the commuter trains, the crowd of workers flowing over London Bridge. But work is not necessarily stultifying. It may, indeed, be so stimulating that the poet neglects his Muse altogether. If Cromwell's Commonwealth had lasted longer and continued to employ Milton's services, *Paradise Lost* might never have been written. But this is not the received wisdom of the workshops with regard to other work than their own. Menial jobs may be admitted on a poet's C.V. as a token of what youth may have to suffer before it is granted tenure, but conspicuous success in another career than poetry is considered bad form, for smugness is the mother of envy.

And so we come to the lowest bolgia in the Dis of American poetry, where the damned are eternally tormented by their *sense of entitlement*, which whispers to the poets, even as it chews them up: "You deserve *better* than this. You are poets, descended from Homer and Shakespeare and Sylvia Plath, and as such superior to drudging novelists or the hacks of Hollywood. Yet do you enjoy an equivalent reward? The fame, the royalties, the readership? No! You have been *marginalized* by an Industry that respects nothing but the Bottom Line and the Almighty Dollar."

This is surely true, in part. Commercial publishing houses have realized that there is little to be gained, even of prestige, by accommodating the needs of poets. The books don't sell, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poets have become scruffier, so that their slim volumes have come to have less and less cachet in all but the academic marketplace, where an anthology edited by well-connected editors can still pay its way by being marketed as a required textbook. More and more, poets must rely on those publishing houses funded by non-profit foundations and tax dollars, and this at a time when there are more and more poets, all of them acutely conscious of the injustice being done.

The dilemma may be faced in two ways. It may be lamented, and it is, often by those very poets who, by virtue of talent, luck, or social advantage, are still published by mainstream publishers. Or, like other irremediable misfortunes, it may be denied.

Usually, lamentation and denial operate in tandem, as they do in a review that recently appeared in *The Kenyon Review* (Volume XVI, Number 3, Summer 1994) of Florence Howe's anthology, *No More Masks! An Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Women Poets*. The reviewer, Adrian Oktenberg, begins on a triumphalist note:

> In the last twenty years, the feminist movement and the parallel emergence of feminist poetry, together with similar political movements and poetries of people of color and gays and lesbians, have utterly changed the landscape of American poetry. These movements have coalesced with such speed and force that mainstream critical and literary journals are still catching up with them, and remain at the beginning in understanding the changes they have forced. What is considered "appropriate" for a poem, particularly one by a woman writer—the range of subject matter, language, the point of view allowed or expected—has changed to an extent almost unimaginable twenty years ago. We have new subject matters for poetry now, new languages to use in making poems . . .

Oktenberg then provides a brief bibliography of the twenty years since the first edition of *No More Masks!* appeared, cataloguing at some length not only the first publications of the anthology's more illustrious contributors but the year in which they became important. Then, still in a celebratory mode, she continues:

> . . . Women have begun to say more fully who we are, what we want, how we feel, and to publish it. And because poetry has never been a luxury to women or to other marginalized or oppressed groups, women poets find numbers of willing and eager readers. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> critical attention that changes the canon has followed: some poets (Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Rita Dove, Louise Glück, others) are being admitted to the canon, taught, anthologized, prized. Women's poetry has been and is a stunning success.

There is an "however," and it constitutes most of the review, which, while accepting all Howe's selectees as meriting admission to the club, nevertheless is distressed at her admissions policy:

> . . . Howe does say in her introduction that, in order to be included, a poet had to have published at least two books. This rule is by itself a mistake. . . . It permits the omission of genius. . . [T]he *feminist* anthology ought to recognize that the two-book rule would tend to penalize working class or poor writers, women of color, younger and older writers, lesbians, and so on . . .

Is that classic, or what? But Oktenberg goes on to list no less than thirty-six omitted geniuses unjustly excluded by the two-book rule. Feminists are, admittedly, under a disadvantage, having to bear a chip on their shoulders for over half of the human race. A gay or black or Mormon or Asian-American complainant might not have to cite so many contenders for the laurels of twentieth-century greatness.

But they might. For, in the absence of critical standards, all poets are equal. Oktenberg hasn't a bad word to say about anybody. They are women, they are poets, they are strong. In the poetry establishment, as presently constituted, everyone gets a hug, and expects to get a Guggenheim. One might take exception to poets of the wrong persuasion, as feminists do, categorically, to Ted Hughes, that fatal spouse, but on the whole it is impolitic to speak ill of poets, unless they are safely outside the pale.

In its ideal version, as re-edited by Adrian Oktenberg, *No More Masks!* would probably bear a strong resemblance to the *Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets*, except that there would be no men in it and there would have to be enough poems by poets of established reputation so that all the no-longer-omitted geniuses could bask in the reflected glory. Whether such a large proportion of the contributors would also be teachers of creative writing as in the Morrow anthology I have no way of knowing, but if there were such an imbalance, surely those presently lacking such employment would be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

speeded on their way to that happy condition by inclusion in any anthology that authenticated them as a "Twentieth-Century American Woman Poet." What other purpose, after all, is to be served by publishing anthologies?

It is a cruel dilemma. There are so many more poets than there are workshops to employ them, despite the best efforts of the industry. Unemployed poets might be heartened to know that they share this post-industrial fate with nuclear physicists, assembly-line workers, actors, and cosmetologists. In all these fields the supply of contestants vastly exceeds the supply of prizes.

For education, like steel and music, is an industry, and the object of any industry must be to attract enough customers to keep the work force occupied. The customers of the education industry are people needing jobs. Poetry has become one of the jobs.

Is there no remedy?

As well ask, is there a problem?

To both questions I would answer, probably not.

Fame and fortune are capricious; resentment is forever, until the resentful fall silent and are forgotten (or are marginalized). Omitted geniuses either come into their own in the fullness of time or join the ranks of mute, inglorious Miltons. It's a crapshoot. And none of this has much relation to the *experience* of poetry. Keats was knocked out when he came upon (of all things) Chapman's Homer. I have a sincere regard for the anti-genius of the Scottish bard MacGonaghal. We both might be wrong.

But I equivocate. For I do believe there is a remedy, and that is the disestablishment of poetry workshops as an academic institution. (Yes, I know, I said just the opposite above, but I was wrong.) The art of poetry is poorly served by its bureaucratization, and only the trade is advanced. I will even venture a prophecy (which is the prerogative of poets, if not of critics)—that they will, in my own lifetime, self-destruct. Not because Jesse Helms, or his like, mandates a holy war against the poets funded by the NEA, but because students, wiser than their teachers, choose other electives.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MICHAEL COLLIER

THE NEIGHBOR

"The dark splendor of this collection is the burden of its witnessing, the quiet courage of a speaker who will not turn away from what he sees and remembers, from the human drama unfolding before him."—Edward Hirsch

"A book of great intelligence about the surfaces of the world and of the hidden structures that lie beneath it."—Tom Sleigh

Paper $9.95 72 pages Cloth $20.00

Phoenix Poets Series

Available at bookstores.

The University of Chicago Press

5801 S. Ellis Ave., Chicago, IL 60637

TWO BY BERT O. STATES

The Pleasure of the Play

Never losing sight of the interaction between play and spectator, States provides a spirited view of works by Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov, Pinter, Brecht, Beckett, Stoppard, Churchill, and many others. "*The Pleasure of the Play* is such an intelligent, compelling discussion of fundamental points about tragedy that I couldn't put it down. . . . States writes in a wonderfully lucid style, and he impels you to argue with him."—Maurice Charney, Rutgers University. $34.50 cloth, $12.95 paper

Dreaming and Storytelling

In this witty and eminently readable book, States rethinks both the meaning of dreams and the relationship between dreaming and the telling of stories. Dreams he says, constitute a private literature of the self, and—despite their seeming lack of order or structure—can help us to understand the very nature of shared literature. $26.95

Cornell

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Sage House • 512 East State Street • Ithaca NY 14850

At bookstores, or call
(607) 277–2211
(credit card orders only)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LOUIS SIMPSON

These Sounds and This Movement

(Translations from the French of Valery Larbaud)

Ode

Lend me your great noise, your great smooth speed,
Your nocturnal gliding across lighted Europe,
O train de luxe! and the agonizing music
That hums along your corridors of gilded leather,
While behind lacquered doors with latches of heavy copper
Sleep the millionaires.
I wander through your corridors singing
And I follow your course toward Vienna and Budapest,
Mingling my voice with your hundred thousand voices,
O Harmonica-Zug!

I felt for the first time all the sweetness of life
In a compartment of the North Express between Wirballen
and Pskow.
We were gliding by meadows where shepherds
At the foot of groups of great trees like hills
Were clothed in raw and dirty sheepskin . . .
(Eight o'clock on an autumn morning, and the beautiful
singer
With violet eyes was singing in the next compartment.)
And you, great squares across which I have seen Siberia as it
passed and the hills of Samnium,
Harsh, unflowering Castille, and the sea of Marmara under
a warm rain!

Lend me, O Orient Express, South-Brenner-Bahn, lend me
Your miraculous deep sounds and
Your vibrant voices like first strings;
Lend me the light and easy breathing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of tall, slender locomotives with such unconstrained
Movements, the express locomotives
Effortlessly preceding four yellow coaches with gold lettering
In the mountainous solitudes of Serbia,
And, further away, crossing Bulgaria with all its roses . . .

Ah! these sounds and this movement
Must enter my poems and speak
For my life that has no speech, my life
Like a child's that does not want to know anything, only
To hope eternally for vague things.

Night in the Port

The vaporized face of Portugal
(Oh to live in that odor of oranges and fresh fog!)
On my knees on the divan in the dark cabin—
Having turned off the branching lights—
Through the round, clear porthole cutting through the night
I spy out the town.
That's it, that's it. I recognize
The avenue with casinos and dazzling cafés,
With the perspective of its globes of light, white
Through the hanging curtains of somber palms.
Here are the lighted facades of immense hotels,
Restaurants casting rays on the sidewalks, beneath the arcades,
And the gilded grills of the Residency gardens.
Again I know all the corners of that African town:
Here is the Post Office, and the South station, and I also know
The road I would take to go from the docks
To such and such shop, hotel or theater;
And all that is at the end of that blue undulation of calm water

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On which tremble reflections of the lights of the yacht . . .
Some sun-drenched months of my life are still there
(Such as memory gave them back to me in London),
They are there once more, and real, before me,
Like a big box full of toys on the bed of a sick child . . .
I shall also see again people I've known
Without liking them, and who are much less to me
Than the palms and fountains of the town;
Those people who don't travel, but remain
Near their excrements without ever getting bored,
I shall see again those heads temporarily forgotten, and they
Continuing their narrow lives, their ideas and their business
As if they had not lived since my departure . . .
No, I shall not go ashore, and tomorrow
At daybreak the *Jaba* will raise anchor;
In the meantime I shall pass this night with my past,
Near my past seen through a hole
As in the dioramas at country fairs.

Indian Ocean

Oh night of tropical summer!
Glittering atolls emerging from blue abysses!
The blazing Southern Cross!
Oh to lie stretched out on the deck of a great ship
En route to Malaysia,
Naked, gaping at the infinity that gapes at me.
(My heart of an abandoned child, O dear dear sick friend,
My heart would be content to press your hand
In this shadow on fire of dazzling
Nights in which I would like to take flight.)
On the ships of olden days, with their flags,
The stern a palace with a hundred gilded windows,
Surmounted by a Himalaya of sails,
One did not have, uninterrupted, this palpitation of stars,
This vision of Creation, immensely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Silent—the firmament all unrolled above one's head.
I long for a spring morning, somewhat gray, in the hotel
room,
The corner window opening on the rue Noailles, fresh air,
And to see over there (five o'clock, no trams running yet)
The calm Old Port and boats of the Château d'If.

The Old Cahors Station

Traveler! O cosmopolitan! at present
Disengaged, withdrawn, retired from business.
A little set back from the road,
Old and rosy amidst the miracles of morning,
With your useless awning
You extend your empty platform to the sun on the hills
(The platform that used to be swept
By billowing air-skirts of the great expresses)
Your platform standing silent at the edge of a meadow
With the doors always closed to your waiting rooms
Where summer's heat cracks the shutters . . .
O station who have seen so many adieus,
So many departures and many returns,
Station, O double door opening on the delightful immensity
Of the Earth, on which somewhere the joy of God must be
found
As an unexpected, dazzling thing;
From now on you rest and taste the seasons
That return bringing wind or sun, and your stones
Know the cold light of lizards, and the tickling
Of the wind's light fingers in grass where the rails
Lie red and roughened with rust
Is your only visitor.
The shaking of trains no longer caresses you:
They pass far away without stopping on your grassy verge,
And leave you to your bucolic peace, O finally tranquil
station
At the cool heart of France.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yaravi

In this great blast of black wind we're cleaving
Exalted, I wander weeping on the deck of the yacht;
Midnight at sea and no land in sight.
A little while ago at sunset
In the fog the cannons of the Bosporus rumbled,
The coast of Asia replying to the coast of Europe
(To guide the ships) every quarter hour.
And it was with these warlike sounds astern that, bounding,
My ship with the clownish name, *Narrenschiff*,
Entered this night of pitch and chaos on the Black Sea . . .

When still a child I traversed this road
Of darkness, this unrolling of the great tide of porphyry
Heaped with livid flowers of seaboard edelweiss.

O tomorrow! the sunrise on the shores
And in my dear heart filled with bells!
To infinity, the coasts of the Ottoman Empire
Rosy and green, with soft undulations, where lie concealed
Villages the color of earth and old fortresses;
Or perhaps the approach to a Russian port, announced
By thousands of green gourds floating on the brilliant water
(As Italy sometimes, more discreetly
Announces itself to the navigator by an empty flask rocking
On the Tyrrhenian tide).

Oh the rising of the sun in summer on echoing seas
And the silence of shores seen from afar!

But let me be moved a while thinking of my childhood,
See myself again at fifteen in the streets of Odessa;
Let me weep in the night without knowing why,
And sing these verses to the wind:
"Ya que para mi no vives,"
To the tune of a waltz heard I don't know where, a Gypsy
tune,
Sobbing as I sing to a Gypsy tune!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In memory I revisit dazzling countries:
Roadsteads full of ships and blue harbors
Bordered with quays planted with giant palms and gigantic
Fig trees, like tents of hide hung in the sky;
And immense half-submerged forests,
And the shady *paseos* of Barcelona;
Domes of silver and crystal beneath an azure sky;
And Little Cytherea, as hollow as a cup,
Where, beside the smoothest streams in the world,
All the pastorals of ancient times are played;
And those Greek islands that float on the sea . . .

I couldn't say if it's despair or happiness
That makes me weep so, mingling
My stifled sobs with the terrified cries of the north wind,
The rhythm of machinery, thunder and whistling
Of waves twisted in masses of glass on the sides
Of the ship, and suddenly spread out like a mantle of
precious stones
(But all that is invisible) . . .

But my sorrow . . . Oh my sorrow, my beloved!
Who will adopt this unreasoning sorrow
That the past has not known and whose secret
No doubt will be closed to the future?
Oh to prolong the memory of this modern sorrow,
This grief that has no reasons, but
To me is a gift from Heaven.

The Gift of Myself

I offer myself to everyone as a reward;
I give it to you even before you've deserved it.

There is something inside me,
At the bottom of myself, at the center of myself,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Something infinitely arid
Like the summit of the highest mountains;
Something comparable to the dead focus of the retina,
And without an echo,
And yet that sees and listens;
A being with a life of its own that nevertheless
Lives all my life, and listens impassively
To all the babblings of my conscious mind.

A being made of nothing, if that is possible,
Insensible to my physical sufferings,
That does not weep when I weep,
That does not laugh when I laugh,
That does not blush when I commit a shameful deed,
And that does not groan when my heart is wounded,
That keeps still and does not give advice,
But seems to say eternally:
"I am there, indifferent to everything."

Perhaps it is of the void as the void is,
But so large that Good and Evil together
Are not able to fill it.
There hate dies of asphyxiation
And the greatest love never enters.

Then take my whole self: the meaning of these poems,
Not what you read, but the thing that crosses it in spite of me;
Take it, take it, you have nothing.
And wherever I go, in the entire universe,
I shall always be meeting
Outside myself as in myself,
The unfillable Void,
The unconquerable Nothing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Images

I

One day at Kharkov, in a densely populated area,
(O that Meridional Russia where all the women
With white shawls on their heads look like Madonnas!),
I saw a young woman coming from the fountain
Carrying, as they do, just as in the time of Ovid,
Two buckets suspended from the ends of a piece of wood
Balanced on her neck and shoulders.
And I saw a child in rags approach and speak to her.
Then, amiably inclining her body to the right,
She let down the bucket of pure water so that it rested on
the pavement
Level with the lips of the child that had kneeled to drink.

II

One morning in Rotterdam on the quay of Boompjes
(It was the 18th of September 1900, around eight o'clock),
I observed two young girls going off to their workshops;
And in front of one of the great iron bridges they were
saying goodbye,
Their roads not being the same.
They kissed each other tenderly; their trembling hands
Wished and did not wish to separate; their mouths
Drew distant sorrowfully and came together again
While they gazed in each other's eyes . . .
Thus they remained a long moment close to each other
Upright and motionless among the busy passers-by,
While the tugs grumbled on the river
And trains maneuvered whistling on the iron bridges.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III

Between Cordova and Seville
There is a small station where, for no apparent reason,
The South Express always stops.
In vain the traveler searches with his eyes for a village
Beyond that little station asleep beneath the eucalyptus trees.
He sees only the Andalusian countryside, green and golden.
However, on the other side of the track, facing it,
There is a hut of black branches and earth.
And at the sound of the train a swarm of ragged children
comes out.
Their older sister precedes them, and approaches on the
platform,
And without saying a word, but smiling,
She dances for pennies.
Her feet in the dust appear to be black;
Her swarthy and dirty face is without beauty;
She dances, and through large holes in her skirt the color of
ashes
You see, nakedly, the movements of her scrawny thighs
And rolling of her little yellow stomach;
And this is why, every time, some gentlemen laugh
In the odor of cigars in the diner.

Postscript

O my God, will it never be possible
For me to know that sweet woman over there in Little
Russia,
And those two friends in Rotterdam,
And the young Andalusian beggar woman,
And for me to bind myself to them
In indissoluble friendship?
(Alas, they will not read these poems,
They will know neither my name nor the tenderness in my
heart;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And yet they exist, they are living *now*.)
Will it never be possible for me to have the great joy
Of knowing them?
For I don't know why, my God, but it seems that with these four
I could conquer a world!

Valery Larbaud

Valery-Nicolas Larbaud was born in 1881 in Vichy, France. In his early years he traveled with his mother in Europe and to Russia and Constantinople. Later journeys would take him to Greece, Algeria, Sweden. . . . In 1908 he published a limited edition of poems based on his travels. The author of *Poems by a Rich Amateur* is supposedly "Barnabooth." Marcel Arland, in his preface to the Pléiade edition of Larbaud's writings, remarks that Barnabooth is not Larbaud but "it is in their relations, through exaggeration and caricature, that Larbaud discovers and affirms himself." In 1913 Larbaud published a much larger collection: *A. O. Barnabooth, his Complete Works, that is to say, a Tale, his Poems and his Intimate Journal.*

Larbaud was a prolific literary journalist and translator. Among other works he published translations of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," poems and prose by Whitman, Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*. He died in Vichy on February 2, 1957.

L.S.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ALAN JACOBS

Auden's Local Culture

1

One of the more interesting developments in American political and social thought in the last decade or so has been the emergence of communitarianism—in large part because, though no one knows exactly what communitarianism is, people do tend to think good thoughts about the notion of community. As Wendell Berry writes, "Community is a concept, like humanity or peace, that virtually no one has taken the trouble to quarrel with; even its worst enemies praise it." Perhaps some communitarians have chosen not to define their aims and goals too specifically because they know that the cold light of specificity tends to dispel the warm fuzzy aura that surrounds that word "community."

But some attempts at definition have been made. According to Christopher Lasch, who should know, communitarianism "proposes a general strategy of devolution or decentralization, designed to end the dominance of large organizations [this means multinational corporations as well as the U.S. government] and to remodel our institutions on a human scale." Communitarians, then, inveigh against the old habit of thinking of the *polis* largely in national terms, and advocate its replacement by more localized forms of attention.

A curious trait of communitarians is that few of them seem to have arrived at their position willingly. Rather, they have become communitarians only because more grandiose and universal systems (whether Marxism, old-fashioned liberalism, or state capitalism) have, in their view, failed us all. In this regard the paradigmatic communitarian, it seems to me, is St. Francis of Assisi. After he discovered the Biblical principles on which he and his followers would base their brotherhood—by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

picking three verses at random from the Gospels—he sought again and again to bring his message to other parts of the known world. But each time he prepared to voyage forth to make his message universal, some barrier (whether a Pope's edict or the collapse of his health or God's unmediated will) would prevent him from leaving Italy; thus he was forced, until quite late in his career, to cultivate the Franciscan spirit of community only in his native Umbria. Like most communitarians, then, Francis became one by default. No one, it seems, wants *cultiver son jardin* as long as changing the world remains a viable option.

This is especially the case for intellectuals, because, as Karl Mannheim pointed out many years ago in his *Ideology and Utopia*, intellectuals in Western societies form a distinct class "whose special task is to provide an interpretation of the world." An intellectual, then, by definition thinks globally rather than locally; so much so that to accept the validity of local concerns is to court excommunication from the church of the clerisy. This danger may best be seen, I think, in the example of Albert Camus. Think of some of his most notorious statements about the Algerian conflict in which his family was endangered: "I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother before justice." "Love is injustice, but justice is not enough." "If anyone . . . thinks heroically that one's brother must die rather than one's principles, I shall go no farther than to admire him from a distance. I am not of his stamp." If the virulence with which such statements were repudiated by the French intelligentsia seems shocking today, that is only because in the intervening thirty-five years we have lost confidence in the mental and moral detachment of the intellectual. Even if the detachment and objectivity of the intellectual is a fiction, it remains (if Mannheim is right, and I think he is) necessary to the very concepts of "intellectual" and "intelligentsia." To the adherents of that fiction, the celebration of local culture and local knowledge is anathema.

These reflections apply quite directly, I believe, to one of the more interesting, if largely unacknowledged, predecessors of the contemporary communitarian movement, the poet W. H. Auden. Though Auden settled on communitarian principles with great reluctance, after the defeat of his universalist hopes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he articulated those principles with remarkable force and clarity in twenty-five years of beautiful, but to this day largely unappreciated, poetry. Moreover, I contend that Auden understood both the costs and benefits of choosing to cultivate local knowledge and local attachments better than almost any political thinker writing about such issues today. For that reason alone his work on this subject deserves our attention. But it also repays study because of certain conflicts into which Auden's particular brand of communitarianism drew him—conflicts that may have been inevitable.

2

What we need here is a vantage point from which to survey both the early and the later Auden, and that point is provided by "New Year Letter," the first long poem Auden wrote after he moved to America at the outset of the Second World War. One of the most notable and surprising features of this poem is its celebration of local culture. Auden's conception of what local culture is and what it does develops throughout the "New Year Letter," but finds condensed expression near the beginning, as Auden remembers a recent gathering of friends at the home of Elizabeth Mayer (to whom this "letter" is written). After describing the various objects and actions which with a "neutral eye" the sun observes on earth, he writes that this same sun

> Lit up America and on
> A cottage in Long Island shone
> Where BUXTEHUDE as we played
> One of his *passacaglias* made
> Our minds a *civitas* of sound
> Where nothing but assent was found,
> For art had set in order sense
> And feeling and intelligence,
> And from its ideal order grew
> Our local understanding too.

The phrase "ideal order" comes from T. S. Eliot's famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "The existing monu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ments [of European art] form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them." But while Eliot's concerns are merely intertextual, describing only how these "monuments" are organized and deployed in relation to one another, Auden's interests are markedly different: the question for him is, How does art help us (if indeed it does) to set our lives in order? For Eliot the ideal order is to be contemplated and celebrated; for Auden it is to be used. And it finds its use in the formation of "local understanding," of small groups of people united, if only temporarily, to become citizens of their own tiny republic.

Later in the poem, at the beginning of its third and last part, Auden returns to the same message:

> And SCHUBERT sang and MOZART played
> And GLUCK and food and friendship made
> Our privileged community
> That real republic which must be
> The State all politicians claim,
> Even the worst, to be their aim.

I quote this passage too because otherwise it might not be clear how such an apparently high view of art's utility could be reconciled with that famous opinion Auden had pronounced for the first (but certainly not the last) time almost exactly a year before, in his famous elegy on Yeats: "Poetry makes nothing happen." Does Auden now mean to say that if poetry can't make anything happen music can? There were certainly times in his later career when he came close to saying just that, but in the context of the "New Year Letter" I think the point is that art, while it cannot of its own power *enforce* any alteration of consciousness or morality, can *help* those who would be joined together to find their desired unity. Artists can never become the legislators of the world, either acknowledged or unacknowledged—Auden often expressed scorn and repulsion for Shelley's famous claim—but they can become after a fashion public servants. Yet even this they can only do successfully if the public they serve is small enough for real commonality of purpose to be possible: art can promote "local understanding" in a minia-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ture *civitas*, but cannot change the world. And this is true not because art is weak, but because, in Auden's view in 1940, all dreams of universal or even national unity, dreams which he himself had tried for a decade to share in, are fundamentally absurd. Art can serve only local understanding because local understanding is the only understanding there is.

3

One of the more interesting points to be made about Auden's conclusion here is that he had been confronted with just such an example of perfect local understanding—an example even more perfect, and certainly far more dramatic, than he found in Elizabeth Mayer's Long Island home—less than seven years before, and had been unable to accept it. He did not provide a full account of the experience until 1964, thirty years after it had occurred, and even then he did not openly admit that the experience was his own. The account needs to be quoted at some length:

> One fine summer night in June 1933 I was sitting on a lawn after dinner with three colleagues, two women and one man. . . . We were talking casually about everyday matters when, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, something happened. I felt myself invaded by a power which, though I consented to it, was irresistible and certainly not mine. For the first time in my life I knew exactly—because, thanks to the power, I was doing it—what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself. I was also certain, though the conversation continued to be perfectly ordinary, that my three colleagues were having the same experience. (In the case of one of them, I was later able to confirm this.) My personal feelings towards them were unchanged—they were still colleagues, not intimate friends—but I felt their existence as themselves to be of infinite value and rejoiced in it.
>
> I recalled with shame the many occasions on which I had been spiteful, snobbish, selfish, but the immediate joy was greater than the shame, for I knew that, so long as I was possessed by this spirit, it would be literally impossible for me deliberately to injure another human being. I also knew that the power would, of course, be withdrawn sooner or later and that, when it did, my greed and self-regard would return. The experience lasted at its full intensity for about two hours when we said good-night to each other and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> went to bed. When I awoke the next morning, it was still present, though weaker, and it did not vanish completely for two days or so. The memory of the experience has not prevented me from making use of others, grossly and often, but it has made it much more difficult for me to deceive myself about what I am up to when I do. And among the various factors which several years later brought me back to the Christian faith in which I had been brought up, the memory of this experience and asking myself what it could mean was one of the most crucial, though, at the time it occurred, I thought I had done with Christianity for good.

This story fits nicely with the celebration of "local understanding" elaborated in "New Year Letter": here indeed is a tiny Athens, even a miniature New Jerusalem. But when Auden wrote a poem about the experience, soon after it happened, his chief concern was to articulate his sense that the acceptance of such an excessively local culture was morally and politically indefensible.

The early stanzas of the poem, which Auden would eventually give the title "A Summer Night," show no sign of uneasiness:

> Equal with colleagues in a ring
> I sit on each calm evening
> Enchanted as the flowers
> The opening light draws out of hiding
> From leaves with all its dove-like pleading,
> Its logic and its powers:
>
> That later we, though parted then,
> May still recall these evenings when
> Fear gave his watch no look;
> The lion griefs loped from the shade
> And on our knees their muzzles laid,
> And Death put down his book.

But as the poem moves on its center of interest shifts: what about those who are not so fortunate as to be enclosed within such an Edenic "ring"? How does an acknowledgement of their existence affect the comfortable insiders? Or is life in such an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enchanted circle dependent on a studied ignorance of those outside? Perhaps the insiders, "whom hunger cannot move,"

> do not care to know,
> Where Poland draws her eastern bow,
> What violence is done,
> Nor ask what doubtful act allows
> Our freedom in this English house,
> Our picnics in the sun.
>
> The creepered wall stands up to hide
> The gathering multitudes outside
> Whose glances hunger worsens;
> Concealing from their wretchedness
> Our metaphysical distress,
> Our kindness to ten persons.

This vision of love and community, then, may not be a free gift in which to rejoice, but a dangerous temptation to social quietism: it is at best a "doubtful act." What the Auden of 1964 celebrates as a blessed inability to harm others, the Auden of 1933 fears as an insidious tendency to be satisfied with one's "kindness to ten persons" while the "gathering multitudes" outside starve. The perfect local understanding which the Auden even of 1940 celebrates as an incalculable gift, the Auden of 1933 finds a scandal precisely because it is local and not universal.[1]

[1] There is reason to think that Auden had this poem in mind when he was writing "New Year Letter." While the later poem describes, as noted above, the rising of the sun with its "neutral" and uncomprehending vision of the world below, "A Summer Night" describes the rising of the moon in very similar terms:

> She climbs the European sky;
> Churches and power-stations lie
> Alike among earth's fixtures:
> Into the galleries she peers
> And blankly as an orphan stares
> Upon the marvellous pictures.
>
> To gravity attentive, she
> Can notice nothing here . . .

This curious parallel can be explained, perhaps, by Auden's habit in the early 1940s (noted by Edward Mendelson) of returning not only to the themes of his earlier work but also to its genres, and as it were rewriting his career.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How, then, did Auden get in less than seven years from the one position to the other? One might begin by describing his disillusionment with Marxism and his return to Christianity, a return which was not yet complete when "New Year Letter" was written but was nearly so. But we should be careful here. That Auden rejected Marxism and became a Christian is certainly true; but there is no necessary connection between Christianity and the embrace of local culture exemplified in "New Year Letter." In fact, it would be more accurate to say that Marxism and Christianity alike stand opposed to such localization of culture, which finds more sympathy in certain ancient Greek and Roman modes of political thought (Aristotle rather than Plato, Horace rather than Virgil). The cultivation of "local understanding," as is manifest in the passages quoted from both "New Year Letter" and "A Summer Night," requires as an essential, perhaps *the* essential, component the cultivation of friendship—and friendship, while an Aristotelian virtue, tends to be suspect both to Marxism (which opposes to it the ideal of "comradeship") and to Christianity (which opposes to it the ideal of "brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ"). Jeremy Taylor, the seventeenth-century Anglican divine, wrote: "When friendships were the noblest things in the world, charity was little." In other words, when the ancient Greeks and Romans emphasized the great virtue of friendship, they neglected to care for those who stood outside *philia*'s charmed circle: the "gathering multitudes" outside the "creepered wall." Likewise Samuel Johnson: "All friendship is preferring the interest of a friend, to the neglect, or, perhaps, against the interest of others. . . . Now Christianity recommends universal benevolence, to consider all men as our brethren; which is contrary to the virtue of friendship, as described by the ancient philosophers." One might easily argue that Marxism inherits this Christian universalism, while proposing alternative explanations for its practical failure and alternative means for its eventual realization. Thus it is by no means obvious that Auden's embrace of Christianity would naturally lead to an embrace of local culture and local understanding.

In fact, it seems to me that Auden's return to Christianity and his celebration of local culture form two rather distinct movements in his intellectual life that meet at only one point, a point

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which we will soon identify. First, it is vital to note that at no point in Auden's intellectual development does he deny that human beings are capable of creating universal *evil*. For instance, from "New Year Letter":

> And more and more we are aware,
> However miserable may be
> Our parish of immedicacy,
> How small it is, how, far beyond,
> Ubiquitous within the bond
> Of an impoverishing sky,
> Vast spiritual disorders lie.

Then follows a catalogue of those "disorders," from China to Spain to Ethiopia to Poland. But a grave spiritual and moral danger, Auden argues, arises from the recognition of such universal evil. "Who," he asks,

> will not feel blind anger draw
> His thoughts toward the Minotaur,
> To take an early boat for Crete
> And rolling, silly, at its feet
> Add his small tidbit to the rest?
> It lures us all; even the best,
> *Les hommes de bonne volonté*, feel
> Their politics perhaps unreal
> And all they have believed untrue,
> Are tempted to surrender to
> The grand apocalyptic dream
> In which the persecutors scream
> As on the evil Aryan lives
> Descends the night of the long knives,
> The bleeding tyrant dragged through all
> The ashes of his capitol.

One might with cause assume that Auden here is arguing for pacifism, claiming that the attempt to defeat Hitler will reduce the Allies to Hitler's moral level. But Auden, though he felt the appeal of pacifism, never embraced it, and soon after writing "New Year Letter" explicitly rejected it. Instead, Auden

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is warning the Allies that they are not immune to the forces that (as he wrote about Germany in "September 1, 1939") "have driven a culture mad"; the great if not inevitable danger of fighting the Nazis is that one may become contaminated by the very disorder one sets out to cure. Thus the little parable that, in the Notes which he originally appended to "New Year Letter," Auden attaches to the lines about throwing oneself at the feet of the Minotaur:

> During the last war Frau M was in Tübingen. Walking home one cloudy night, she met two professors from the university, carrying rifles.
>
> "What's the matter?" she asked.
>
> "There's an enemy aeroplane overhead. Can't you see its pilot-light?"
>
> "But that's not an aeroplane. That's Jupiter."

Having thrown themselves at the feet of what Auden calls in *The Sea and the Mirror* "the Minotaur of Authority," these men have lost their ability to make elementary moral and even perceptual discriminations. And let us not fail to note that these are professors, a fact that indicates that Auden's warning is chiefly directed against the intellectuals, who are in the greatest danger of all because of their conviction that their detachment and objectivity place them beyond danger. This is a lesson, I believe, Auden learned in Spain, where he saw how the Republicans (surely *hommes de bonne volonté*), consumed with hatred for anything associated with the old regime, had closed and in many cases wrecked or burned the churches of Barcelona—and without eliciting recognition of their act, much less disapproval, from their supporters among the intelligentsia.

Perhaps Auden's insistence upon the nearly infinite human capacity for evil would not have been so objectionable to the intellectuals of his time, were it not for his equally vivid insistence that it does *not* follow that humans are capable of equally great goodness. A consistent theme in Auden's work of this period is that we lack the power to *undo* the evil that we have the power to *do*. It is this belief that leads Auden to what would become one of the most persistent features of his poetry until his death: his praise of humility. *This* is the point at which his conversion to Christianity and his acceptance of the validity of local culture converge.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

4

One of the first significant appearances of this *leitmotif* is in Auden's great sonnet sequence of 1938, "In Time of War," which grew out of his and Christopher Isherwood's visit to China. In the last sonnet of the sequence, for instance, Auden describes the hopes for human perfection in a perfectly innocent past of what Eliot would call "unified sensibility" and in a perfectly ordered future—these being the dreams, as he would later write in the "Vespers" section of the "Horae Canonicae," of the Arcadian and the Utopian respectively. But here he calmly rejects both visions of perfection as being incompatible with the fundamental human condition:

> But we are articled to error; we
> Were never nude and calm like a great door
>
> And never will be perfect like the fountains.

A full understanding of this inevitable fallenness requires not only humility but a recognition of the historical value of humility: in the verse "Commentary" to the sequence Auden writes of the importance of giving "Our gratitude to the Invisible College of the Humble, / Who through the ages have accomplished everything essential." Auden's conviction on this point finds its most perfect poetic expression about a year after the completion of "New Year Letter," in the penultimate (later, upon revision, to be the last) stanza of "At the Grave of Henry James":

> All will be judged. Master of nuance and scruple,
> Pray for me and for all writers living or dead;
> Because there are many whose works
> Are in better taste than their lives; because there is no end
> To the vanity of our calling: make intercession
> For the treason of all clerks.

Auden's humble recognition of the profundity of human evildoing and the limited capacity for doing good has two major consequences for his thought: first, that the Christian belief in original sin and the concomitant need for salvation from God

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is, in all essentials, right; second, that one must do what one can, not what one wishes one could do, to make things better. In the famous phrase from "Tintern Abbey," Auden determines to cultivate and to praise "that best portion of a good man's life: / His little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love"; and from Sydney Smith he learns (a phrase he would often repeat in prose and verse) to "take short views." This emphasis on limited aims, this desired reconciliation with inevitable incompetence, appears often in Auden's later poetry—to take but one example, in "Memorial for the City" (1949), in which a versified history of the failed Constantinian experiment of melding the City of Man with the City of God is followed by the voice of "our Weakness," a voice never acknowledged by the hubristic Constantinians whose best efforts culminated in the encompassing tyrannies of Hitler and Stalin.

Auden's replacement for these great dreams, his determination to cultivate his garden, may be chastised as a philosophy for the cosy, merely domestic ethics. But Auden is quite explicit in his belief that on these grounds and on these grounds only can meaningful culture—and moreover, the kind of culture which both safeguards us from as a culture being "driven mad" in the way the Germans were, and minimizes the danger of becoming like the Nazis in fighting them—be achieved. It is, of course, precisely this view that has caused so many critics to scorn the "new" Auden and long for the earlier, politically-committed Auden. Randall Jarrell, for instance, in a famous attack upon Auden in a 1945 issue of the *Partisan Review*, sneers at "that overweening humility which is the badge of all his saints" and condemns Auden for "moral imbecility" in seeking the salvation of his own soul while heedless of the world being destroyed around him. Jarrell feels that Auden should have somehow put his intellectual powers to work in the war against Hitler rather than criticizing, as Auden did in a 1944 review of a new edition of Grimm's *Märchen*, "the Society for Scientific Diet, the Association of Positivist Parents, the League for the Promotion of Worthwhile Leisure, the Coöperative Camp for Prudent Progressives and all other bores and scoundrels." To which Jarrell: "In the year 1944 these prudent, progressive, scientific, coöperative 'bores and scoundrels' were the enemies

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with whom Auden found it necessary to struggle. Were *these* your enemies, reader? They were not mine."

Auden did not respond to Jarrell's attack; he never responded to attacks. But someone should; therefore, the prosecution having made its case, I will now take the part of the counsel for the defense (on the model of Auden's own "The Public vs. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats").

5

Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, it is customary at this point for the defense attorney to praise the eloquence of the prosecutor. That I cannot do, for it seems to me that despite the customary brilliance of his wit he has spoken neither well nor to the point. He has accused my client of a virtually treasonable disregard of his social and political duty as a writer, and this accusation, with all its unreliable inferences and misleading implications, it is my duty, and my pleasure, to refute. I think you will soon see, ladies and gentlemen, just how insubstantial these apparently weighty charges really are.

Where to begin? The distinguished prosecutor has made so many errors that I struggle to decide which to dispose of first. Perhaps we had best begin by clearing up a potential misunderstanding about the accusation itself. Members of the jury might be forgiven for assuming that the distinguished prosecutor meant at times to chastise my client for having failed to enlist as a soldier—whether of his native Great Britain or of our United States—and to fight in the most literal sense against Hitler's armies. But this cannot be what Mr. Jarrell intended: if such had been his charge, he would have complained that Mr. Auden was writing *at all*, rather than complaining about the specific content of his writing. (And Mr. Jarrell could not make a general attack on writing in wartime without, like King David, standing condemned by his own judgment.)

No, the essential charge the prosecutor levels against my client is the charge of *frivolity*: the allegation is that Mr. Auden fiddles while Europe burns. The cause of this frivolity, or rather its justification, according to the prosecutor, is Mr. Auden's belief in the Christian doctrine (traditionally, if not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

accurately, identified with Calvinism) of human depravity: because Mr. Auden believes that *all* have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, he has ceased to make moral discriminations, and this is inexcusably frivolous—especially in the midst of this war, when moral distinctions between the monstrous Hitler and his opponents are vital.

Were this an accurate representation of my client's views, he would indeed be guilty of, in Mr. Jarrell's memorable phrase, "moral imbecility." But it is a wildly and irresponsibly inaccurate account. Mr. Auden has time and again, in public and in private, expressed his opposition to Hitler and Hitler's cause. However, unlike Mr. Jarrell, he does not believe that in so doing he has exhausted his moral responsibilities, because, again unlike Mr. Jarrell, he does not assume that we have all honor and virtue thrust upon us merely through being attacked by an evil force. Mr. Auden never, even for an instant, questions whether the force that has attacked the Allies and Western civilization itself is evil; rather, he asks us to be watchful lest (possessed by a "grand apocalyptic dream" of revenge) we become infected with that same evil ourselves. What the doctrine of human depravity does for Mr. Auden is simply and constantly to remind him that no one can *assume* himself or herself to be invulnerable to the forces that led, first to the Nazis' supremacy in Germany itself, and later to the Nazis' determination to conquer all Europe. Mr. Jarrell, on the other hand, seems never to doubt his moral standing, and appears unaware that the war offers to him, or to any loyal citizen of the Allied nations, any moral temptations whatsoever. This is especially odd when one considers Mr. Jarrell's poems about the life of a common dogface soldier, which indicate his comprehension of the evil that can be done at least by the leaders of an army, even when that army fights in a just cause.

Moreover, the prosecutor has not just misrepresented Mr. Auden's understanding of evil and its manifestations in the current war; he has also simply missed the essential point of the writings by my client that most offend him. The key issue for Mr. Auden is not what the ordinary citizen can and should do in the war, but rather what responsibilities the artist, in particular the poet, must carry out. It is clear that Mr. Jarrell believes that the poet should in some way turn his or her talents to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fight against Hitler; but he does not, or cannot, explain just how this could be done. If he believes that Mr. Auden should be active in translation or propaganda, he should say so. Does he believe that Mr. Auden should write poems about the war? Well, Mr. Auden cannot, like Mr. Jarrell himself, write poems about the experience of being a soldier; what sort of poems, then, should he write? Whatever our prosecutor's answer might be, it appears that he has not thought seriously about Mr. Auden's striking claim that there is *nothing* a poet, *qua* poet, can do to fight against Hitler. "Poetry makes nothing happen," he has famously said; moreover,

> art is a product of history, not a cause. Unlike some other products, technical inventions for example, it does not re-enter history as an effective agent, so that the question whether art should or should not be propaganda is unreal. The case for the prosecution [of Yeats, my client's distinguished predecessor in the dock] rests on the fallacious belief that art ever makes anything happen, whereas the honest truth . . . is that, if not a poem had been written, not a picture painted, not a bar of music composed, the history of man would remain materially unchanged.

If Mr. Auden is wrong in this belief, then he is honestly wrong; and even the most cursory review of the history of Europe will suffice to show that the burden of proof rests on those who disagree. It is understandable that Mr. Jarrell would *want* to believe that art has the power to change the world, and thus that the writer *qua* writer can be a significant weapon against the evil incarnated in Hitler; but it is less understandable that he would exercise such virulence and scorn against a fellow poet who happens to disagree with that assessment of art's power.

Why does Mr. Auden write at all, then, given his skepticism about the power of art? Because while poets are not and can never be the unacknowledged legislators of the world—that job, Mr. Auden says, has been applied for by the Gestapo—they can serve their own community by calling certain important but easily neglected facts to remembrance, and by warning against some equally easily neglected dangers. Poets cannot fight against Hitler, but they can fight against the people and the tendencies in their own society which corrupt that society from within and on the foundational levels of family and locality.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Moreover, it is not inconceivable that some of these corrupting forces are precisely those—"the Society for Scientific Diet, the Association of Positivist Parents, the League for the Promotion of Worthwhile Leisure, the Coöperative Camp for Prudent Progressives"—whom Mr. Jarrell explicitly claims *not* to oppose. It is evident, then, that while there is opposition between Mr. Jarrell and Mr. Auden it does not take the form that Mr. Jarrell claims it does: it is not Jarrell's concern for the world versus Auden's concern for his own personal salvation; rather, it is disagreement over *which* enemies may profitably be fought, *which* superindividual concerns the poet may effectively engage in.

Two conclusions, then, emerge from my exposition of the real ideas of the real Mr. Auden, as opposed to the prosecutor's imaginary versions. First, that if my client has sinned, it is only against Mr. Jarrell's high view of art, and not against English or American society, or against the Allied war effort. And second, a man who goes out of his way, and against the current cultural grain, to warn us of the moral dangers that *we* face as we fight against Hitler, is guilty of anything but "moral imbecility," anything but frivolity. Mr. Auden's is a voice we need to hear, and not, as Mr. Jarrell would counsel, to suppress.

6

What we have done so far, then: first, to trace the history of Auden's conviction that significant culture is and must necessarily be local rather than universal; and second, to defend this conviction against certain misunderstandings, especially those which conceive it to involve a quietistic or even fatalistic withdrawal from all forms of superindividual concern. But what also emerges from reflection on this period of Auden's career is his equally important conviction that this local culture must be deliberately and personally *chosen*. Now, normally those who emphasize the inevitable chosenness of culture (for example, T. S. Eliot) tend also to emphasize its universality, while many communitarian devotees of local culture (for example, Wendell Berry) tend to avoid the question of choice. It is Auden's combination of these two positions that makes him particularly important today.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Let's look at Auden in contrast to the two representative figures I just mentioned. Eliot writes, in a famous passage from "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that tradition "cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour." Presumably, in light of other things he was writing at the time, Eliot means us to understand that this need to obtain tradition only through heroic effort and deliberate choice is the peculiar curse of the modern age; certainly it would not have afflicted John Donne, who (or so Eliot thought at the time) "could feel his thought as immediately as the odour of a rose," living as he did in an age of unified sensibility. It is incidentally important to understand Eliot's later career, his claim to classicism, traditionalism, and so on, to see these positions as choices rather than inherited givens. As Robert Langbaum wrote in *The Poetry of Experience* some thirty years ago: "Are not, after all, even our new classicisms and new Christian dogmatisms really romanticisms in an age which simply cannot supply the world-views such doctrines depend on, so that they become, for all their claims to objectivity, merely another opinion, the objectification of someone's personal view?" I am not sure that Eliot fully understood the implications of this point, but Auden did. The dialectic of choice and necessity is, as many critics have pointed out, an obsession of Auden throughout his career, but it is summed up with exemplary clarity in the prayer that concludes "In Sickness and in Health," written just a few months after "New Year Letter": "O hold us to the voluntary way."

But in any case, what most clearly distinguishes Auden from Eliot is the fact that Eliot's chosen tradition is universal and objective: the "ideal order" of *all* great works of art, the forerunner of Northrop Frye's archetypically organized "imaginative universe." It by definition cannot be confined to a place; it repudiates the insular and parochial—opprobrious terms which in its dialect are synonymous with the local. But as we have already seen, for Auden it is precisely the locality and particularity of the gathering at Elizabeth Mayer's home that enables those people to come together as a genuine, if tiny, *civitas*.

Auden may equally well be contrasted with Berry, who relentlessly and eloquently has argued for the beauty of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

local and its necessity as a foundation for significant culture. But Berry's consistent emphasis is on the need to conserve and protect existing communities, or to restore those that have fallen into neglect and disrepair; he always assumes a history of relations which, if they are not currently active, can be re-established. In essays such as "The Work of Local Culture" and "Writer and Region"—many others could be cited here—Berry posits *memory* as a necessary component of healthy community. In Berry's scheme, it appears, Auden's first move toward community would have to be a return to England; yet England is the one place where, Auden believed, he could not find genuine community, in part because there was no place in England which he could think of as home, but also and more importantly because the English intelligentsia rejected and scorned the convictions he had come to find essential. (In 1940 Auden told Golo Mann, "The English intellectuals who now cry out to Heaven against the evil incarnated in Hitler have no Heaven to cry to; they have nothing to offer and their protests echo in empty space.") Berry cannot, or does not, explain how Auden might find significant local community in America, in New York City of all unlikely places. It is the creation of new community that Auden is concerned with—as he often tried to explain, in letters from this period, to his puzzled English friends—not the restoration of the old; and thus the question of choice, which Berry neglects but which is formulated so eloquently by Langbaum in the passage quoted above, is paramount for him.

From the preceding paragraph it becomes evident that, while I have identified Berry and Auden alike as proponents of local culture, "local" does not mean the same thing to both. There are common points: local culture as both men use the term is restricted in scope, humble in its aspirations, dedicated to preservation and conservation; moreover, it emphasizes and celebrates the social and communal formation of all personal identities. But for Berry—again see "Writer and Region," also "Poetry and Place"—healthy local culture must necessarily be rooted in a particular physical environment, a *place*. Auden does not seem to think so. For more than twenty-five years he lived in New York City, but for only half the year; the other half being spent first on the tiny Italian island of Ischia, later in his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beloved home in the village of Kirchstetten in Austria. Auden thought often and wrote beautifully about these localities, but clearly felt the need, as Berry perhaps does not, to maintain his community solely in his own mind and work. The nature of his profession—it is vital to remember that Berry is a farmer as well as a poet, and would necessarily have a very different understanding of community and local culture if he only wrote poetry—and of his apparently rootless way of life forced Auden to confront a difficult fact: if he were to experience the blessings of communal, local culture at all, he would have to find a means to cultivate such experience that would seem quite alien to more traditional local cultures.

Which is another way of saying that Berry's emphasis on memory does eventually come to be essential even to Auden's peculiar form of local culture: Auden does not have the luxury of beginning with a substantial history, but he soon develops one. From about 1940 on Auden very consciously builds a community of friends and colleagues that he sustains and memorializes through his poetry. No other major poet dedicates so many poems to his friends; the reader of Auden's correspondence, especially letters from the last twenty years of his life, finds that he spent an extraordinary amount of time typing up drafts of his poems for friends, and asking them if he could dedicate those poems to them. And often the themes of these poems involve Auden's reflections on the very issues of this essay: under what conditions communities can thrive, what dangers (internal or external) threaten those communities, and, especially, the importance of being continually thankful for the blessings of friendship and "local understanding." Thus a chief purpose of Auden's later poetry becomes the making of a permanent record of the nature and history of his friendships, that is to say, his community. Poetry—for Auden and, he hopes, for his friends—resumes an ancient (and by Auden much-lamented) function, as a mnemonic device. What must be remembered through poetry, however, is not the number of days in April, but rather the character of one's friendships and the virtues of one's community. Like the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, Auden builds a memory palace, but this one does not remain a Prosperian "insubstantial pageant": it is inscribed on solid paper and bound between hard covers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

7

Earlier I mentioned, briefly, "Memorial for the City" as a poem in which Auden repudiates the Constantinian project. But the very title suggests that Auden retains as part of his conceptual framework the notion of a political entity larger than the tiny *civitas* made up of his friends and colleagues. Every local culture, Auden frequently implies, though it is a *polis* unto itself, also participates in that larger entity more usually called the *polis*. It does not often participate well and meaningfully, largely because it remains unconscious of its responsibilities to the greater City, but in the ideal commonwealth the smallest and largest polities will understand their relation: as he writes near the end of "New Year Letter," "The largest *publicum*'s a *res*, / And the least *res* a *publicum*."

One practical consequence of this view is that each local community must recognize the validity of other such communities and accept that each has a place in the fabric of the whole, Berkeley and Orange County alike. In "Vespers," the fifth of Auden's "Horae Canonicae" (that great and potently condensed sequence of poems that he worked on for about seven years, from the late forties to the mid-fifties), Auden described a brief but significant crossing of paths. At dusk in "our city," the poem's speaker, an Arcadian devoted to contemplation of a charming and idealized past, meets his future-directed Utopian "anti-type"; however,

> Neither speaks. What experience could we possibly share?
>
> Glancing at a lampshade in a store window, I observe it is too hideous for anyone in their senses to buy: He observes it is too expensive for a peasant to buy.
>
> Passing a slum child with rickets, I look the other way: He looks the other way if he passes a chubby one.

The playful tone of the poem should not obscure the underlying seriousness of its theme: "You can see, then, why, between my Eden and his New Jerusalem, no treaty is negotiable." But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this collision of opposites is not the poem's conclusion. It may be, muses the speaker as they move on in their different directions, that this twilit meeting, far from being an accident, is "a rendezvous between two accomplices," each of whom reminds the other "of that half of their secret which he would most like to forget." For "a fraction of a second" each remembers "our victim," a victim both human and innocent, whose blood enables the "secular wall" of the city "safely [to] stand." This victim—Auden says "call him Abel, Remus, what you will, it is one Sin Offering," but these are clearly shadowy types of Christ—in his innocence recalls the unspoiled perfection of Eden, the restoration of which is now the city's hope and goal; but this restoration is only made possible by the shedding of that very innocent's blood, for as St. Paul says, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin"; and this is a fact only the Utopian, willing to make sacrifices for an imagined future, is able to face. Thus these two enemies are in fact equally necessary members of their city, "our dear old bag of a democracy."

The challenge that Auden presents in this poem, then, is to maintain simultaneous allegiances to one's local culture and to the greater polity—assuming that that polity is a democracy, because only in democracy (thinks Auden) can such exceedingly varied and even contradictory local communities be formed and sustained.[2] But it is extraordinarily difficult, even in times such as ours in which there is (supposedly) no higher virtue than toleration, to acknowledge and even celebrate the

[2] A lighter version of this point comes in "Thanksgiving for a Habitat," where Auden describes his Austrian home as a kind of democracy-in-nature:

> I, a transplant
>
> from overseas, at last am dominant
> over three acres and a blooming
> conurbation of country lives, few of whom
> I shall ever meet, and with fewer
>
> converse. Linnaeus recoiled from the Amphibia
> as a naked gruesome rabble,
> Arachnids give me the shudders, but fools
> who deface their emblem of guilt
>
> are germane to Hitler: the race of spiders
> should be allowed their webs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

role one's political opponents play in the constitution of the society. And sad to say, as Auden got older the vision of this great twilit meeting receded and was replaced by withdrawal into the most local of all cultures, the garden cultivated *only* in the mind.

8

I have already said that Auden's lack of attachment to a place causes him to think of the formation of community in terms of thankfulness, remembrance, and inscription: to write poems to and for his friends is to remember and give thanks for their friendship, to build a community on the page that cannot, thanks to the international character of Auden's life and his connections, be built in a single location. But however necessary this form of community-building was for Auden, he pursued it with such vigor and determination that it gradually assumed a kind of perverse life of its own, so that the local culture that he conceived in his mind and memory became preferable to any more material kind. This tendency he was perfectly aware of, though it is not easy to tell if he regretted it. For instance, in "Thanksgiving for a Habitat" (written mostly from 1962-64), Auden writes that one of the greatest blessings of his Austrian home, a dwelling-place "I dared not hope or fight for," is that there "I needn't, ever, be at home to / those I am not at home *with*," which is pretty understandable; but he adds these curious lines in the third poem of the sequence, "The Cave of Making," to his recently deceased friend Louis MacNeice:

> I wish you hadn't
> caught that cold, but the dead we miss are easier
> to talk to: with those no longer
> tensed by problems one cannot feel shy and, anyway,
> when playing cards or drinking
> or pulling faces are out of the question, what else is there
> to do but talk to the voices
> of conscience they have become? From now on, as a visitor
> who needn't be met at the station,
> your influence is welcome at any hour in my ubity . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MacNeice's ghost might well be pleased at being named a "voice of conscience," but perhaps a little uneasy at being considered a more welcome friend now that Auden doesn't have to go to the trouble of meeting his train, and presumably feeding him and finding him a bed. It is true that the dead, as friends, are remarkably little trouble, but even to hint that this makes them *better* friends is to betray an unhealthy pleasure in keeping the garden of one's daily routine well-tended and undisturbed.[3]

Such a tendency provokes a disturbing question: is something like this fate inevitable for forms of local culture that are not, as Berry would have them be, rooted in a particular place? Is the project of building local culture in poems of recognition and gratitude an impossible one? "The houses of our City," Auden writes in another poem from "Habitat," "Grub First, Then Ethics,"

> are real enough but they lie
> haphazardly scattered over the earth,
> and her vagabond forum
> is any space where two of us happen to meet
> who can spot a citizen
> without papers.

But is this good enough? Can a *polis* worthy of the name be sustained by occasional meetings of *cognoscenti* and equally

[3] Auden never gave in completely to this tendency, and certainly did not always feel that friends should be kept at a distance. Again in "Thanksgiving for a Habitat," a poem called "For Friends Only" and dedicated to John and Teckla Clark, describes the Austrian house's guest room and begins thus:

> Ours yet not ours, being set apart
> As a shrine to friendship,
> Empty and silent most of the year,
> This room awaits from you
> What you alone, as visitor, can bring,
> A weekend of personal life.

But in light of the comments to MacNeice, a later stanza may be thought to have a double meaning:

> Distance and duties divide us,
> But absence will not seem an evil
> If it make our re-meeting
> A real occasion.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

occasional poems from one *cognoscente* to others? It seems that Auden feared just that, since the poem goes on,

> So, too, can her foes. Where the
> power lies remains to be seen,
> the force, though, is clearly with them: perhaps only
> by falling can She become
> Her own vision, but we have sworn under four eyes
> to keep Her up . . .

This is a curious passage, because it suggests that Auden's attitude toward the local culture he had striven to build closely resembles his attitude toward the poetic art to which he had dedicated his working life. To Louis MacNeice's ghost he writes,

> . . . Speech can at best, a shadow echoing
> the silent light, bear witness
> to the truth it is not . . .,

but this is an old idea with him. From "New Year Letter":

> Yet truth, like love and sleep, resents
> Approaches that are too intense,
> And often when the searcher stood
> Before the Oracle, it would
> Ignore his grown-up earnestness
> But not the child of his distress,
> For through the Janus of a joke
> The candid psychopompos spoke.

This idea finds its fullest development in *The Sea and the Mirror*, where Caliban, "beating about for some large loose image to define" the experience, recorded in *The Tempest*, of the disillusion of magic and the acceptance of bounds, finally settles on this: "the greatest grandest opera rendered by a very provincial touring company indeed." Paradoxically, it is the very poverty and ineptitude of the production that makes it valuable to its actors, for even though "there was not a single aspect of our whole performance, not even the huge stuffed bird of happi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness, for which a kind word could, however patronisingly, be said," nevertheless it is "at this very moment [that] we do at last see ourselves as we are." At the moment when all pretense to aesthetic achievement helplessly falls away, and the actors are confronted with the authentic selves which they had used their performances to escape, they come to see God precisely in their distance from Him:

> . . . we are blessed with that Wholly Other Life from which we are separated by an essential emphatic gulf of which our contrived fissures of mirror and proscenium arch—we understand them at last—are feebly figurative signs. . . . it is just here, among the ruins and the bones, that we may rejoice in the perfected Work that is not ours.

It is just when the would-be proximity of mimetic art to truth fails that the distance of analogy, with its "feebly figurative signs," manages somehow to succeed.

In "Thanksgiving for a Habitat," Auden seems to be saying something quite similar about the City of which he is a voluntary and self-selected citizen: "perhaps only / by falling can She become / Her own vision." A chief purpose, then, of all humanly built cultures is to produce recognition of the gaping chasm that separates all earthly cities from the City of God, all earthly communities from the Communion of the Saints. The failures of such cultures, then, are not only to be expected but to be welcomed—but only if the effort to perfect them (or at least "keep them up") has been genuine. As Simone Weil never tired of saying, you can confront your weakness only if you have reached the actual limit of your abilities; failures due to laziness have no educational value.

9

Is this a perverse and fatalistic conclusion? Or, to the contrary, an unrealistically hopeful one? For the reader who can share Auden's belief in an eternal City of God, his message is chastening but ultimately reassuring: "All will be judged," he says to Henry James, but in the (later excised) last stanza of that poem he also finds comfort in those words from the Prayer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Book about "Him whose property is always to have mercy, the author / And giver of all good things." For the reader who cannot share that faith, Auden may seem to rest too comfortably in his own inevitable failure to sustain any ideal order, however restricted in its scope and aims. Members of either party, however, should, it seems to me, give thanks to Auden—as I have said, he was always one for giving thanks—for having shown us just how complex and difficult a project the formation of community is, and just how many and how serious are the virtues required to keep it alive and well.

Readers of ***The Hudson Review*** who are interested in Auden may like to know that the W.H. Auden Society exists to put Auden's readers in touch with each other and through publications and conferences to deepen understanding of his work. The Society, which has members on four continents, organizes discounts on books, and circulates a ***Newsletter*** twice a year. Annual membership is $10 ($5 for students, unwaged, etc.; $12 for institutions). Anyone wishing to join should send a cheque (payable to The W.H. Auden Society) to:

Nicholas Jenkins
193 Prospect Place, Apt. 4
Brooklyn, NY 11238

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DAVID MASON

Auden Onstage

> You alone, alone, imaginary song,
> Are unable to say an existence is wrong,
> And pour out your forgiveness like a wine.
> —"The Composer"

Auden's poetry delights in wisdom, finds wisdom in delight. He was one of the greatest lyric poets of our language, yet he worked in forms "large enough to swim in" for his entire career. In musical dramas, radio plays, film scripts, an oratorio, long didactic poems, opera libretti and verse sequences, his philosophical mind pushed him tirelessly beyond his lyric gift, as if the forgiveness of song were not entirely to be trusted. In 1937, Christopher Isherwood wrote of his friend and collaborator, "If Auden had his way, he would turn every play into a cross between grand opera and high mass." Now that Auden's plays and libretti are gathered in the first two volumes of his *Complete Works*, it becomes apparent that he got his way.[1] He pioneered a new allegorical drama, and made the most significant contribution to opera libretti since Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Like the tumbler in his "Ballad of Barnaby," Auden discovered a sacred joy in the varied practice of his craft. When readers realize that these two hefty volumes don't even contain Auden's major work (the poems and prose are yet to come), they may well be awestruck at his monumental energy.

Not everything assembled here is monumental, however, or even good. Slogging through bits of *The Fronny*, all of *The Enemies of a Bishop* and *The Chase* (early versions of Auden and Isherwood's uneven play *The Dog Beneath the Skin*), I wondered who was served by this attempt to publish a great poet's every

[1] THE COMPLETE WORKS OF W.H. AUDEN: Plays and Other Dramatic Writings, 1928–1938, by *W.H. Auden* and *Christopher Isherwood*, ed. by *Edward Mendelson*. Princeton University Press. $39.50. THE COMPLETE WORKS OF W.H. AUDEN: Libretti and Other Dramatic Writings, 1939–1973, by *W.H. Auden* and *Chester Kallman*, ed. by *Edward Mendelson*. Princeton University Press. $49.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doodle. Would Auden have approved? But despite my reservations about these big compendia that cost a kingpin's ransom, I think Auden would have admired the loyal scholarship of Edward Mendelson. It was Auden, after all, who found Yeats's disparaging poem, "The Scholars," libelous: "Edit indeed; Thank God they do. If it had not been for scholars working themselves blind copying and collating manuscripts, how many poems would be unavailable . . . ?" Poets are best represented by their best work, but the Auden canon has always been problematic because of his obsessive revisions and the sheer bulk of his production in so many different genres. The only solution is to scrape every iota of Auden together, set it in some reasonable order and let the reader decide. Mendelson is just the scholar for the job, an excellent textual editor, and both of these volumes do contain treasures rescued from oblivion.

Those willing to read the lesser works collected here, along with the masterpieces and Mendelson's rich notes in the back of each volume, will find fascinating evidence of Auden's prodigious mind. Like the medieval craftsmen he admired, he approached each new literary task as an apprenticeship. We can see Auden and Isherwood learning about dramatic structure here, and how Auden the librettist (together with Chester Kallman) taught himself not only to write verses that could be set to music, but to rethink the dramatic structure of opera.

Auden's first play was a solo effort, *Paid on Both Sides* (1928), a charade intended for performance at the home of an Oxford friend. It bears several earmarks of Auden's theatrical work: a mixture of prose and verse, the latter often with an alliterative Anglo-Saxon cast, and an avoidance of realism in character and scene. Even with some schoolboy silliness, its story of a bloody feud between the Nowers and the Shaws has a haunting power. Like much early Auden, the play deals with borders and the banal violence of families or nations, a world where the secret self figures as a doomed spy. Mendelson has given us two versions of the script, allowing us to see how Auden revised and deepened it. In the second version, John Nower experiences a dream vision of the mysterious Man-Woman, "a prisoner of war behind barbed wire, in the snow." This androgynous figure berates Nower for his superficial life: "Love was not love for you but episodes, / Traffic in memoirs, views from different

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sides. . . . " The hero emerges from his dream changed as though by psychotherapy, able to turn away from boyish alliances and love Anne Shaw, the daughter of his enemy. John and Anne are the doomed lovers who will recur in Auden's works for the stage, especially *On the Frontier*, *The Rake's Progress* and *Elegy for Young Lovers* (versions of this impossible love are also found in his poems, "Lullaby," "As I Walked Out One Evening" and *The Age of Anxiety*). Love is a momentary, perhaps delusional return to the wholeness of Eden. It is intoxicating and dangerous, and Auden's lovers usually know that it cannot last:

> But loving now let none
> Think of divided days
> When we shall choose from ways,
> All of them evil, one.

Anne Shaw's family executes her lover, unwittingly preserving the violent doubleness of a fallen world.

"Damn realism," Auden wrote in his 1929 journal. "Yet it must be real." And in a later entry: "A Play is poetry of action." At about the same time, Auden and Isherwood composed their "Preliminary Statement" or embryonic manifesto on the theatre. Here one can find Audenesque pronouncements on the psychosomatic nature of illness and its correlation to the ills of society, but also statements like "Dramatic action is ritual" and "Dramatic plot is the assertion that God could not exist without Satan." Auden thought of theatre in allegorical terms, and thought poetry as ritual more important than prosaic realism. In a 1938 lecture he would state that "the search for a dramatic form is very closely bound up with something much wider and more important, which is the search for a society which is both free and unified." Despite the experimental quality of his plays, Auden clearly loved theatre's social aspect; he was a natural collaborator.

We should also remember that Auden wrote musicals. Lyrics for *The Dance of Death* and *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (a.k.a. *Dogskin*) were given a score by Herbert Murrill, and the best of them found their way into Auden's collections of verse. His

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eerily premonitory "Witnesses," for example, first appeared in *The Chase*:

> Climb up the crane, learn the sailor's words
> When the ships from the islands laden with birds
> Come in
> Tell your stories of fishing and other men's wives
> The expansive moments of constricted lives
> In the lighted inn.
>
> But do not imagine we do not know
> Nor that what you hide with such care won't show
> At a glance.
> Nothing is done, nothing is said
> But don't make the mistake of believing us dead
> I shouldn't dance.
>
> We're afraid in that case you'll have a fall
> We've been watching you over the garden wall
> For hours
> The sky is darkening like a stain
> Something is going to fall like rain
> And it won't be flowers.

Even the dialogue in these poetic dramas sometimes reads like a trio or duet, as though Auden were already the librettist-in-training.

Isherwood thought of Auden as the musical half of their team; in a 1965 interview with George Wickes he said,

> The whole collaboration really amounted to this: here was Auden, who was obviously already a major poet, and all I felt I was doing was perhaps providing a slightly firmer framework on which these poems could be presented. I don't mean that Auden was incapable of dramaturgy because as a matter of fact he did a great many of the scenes. But my real function was very much that of a librettist, and he was the composer.

Auden had similarly modest things to say about his own contributions to both the plays and the libretti. The point is that it took him and Isherwood some time to get beyond a sort of musical review—stringing lyrics on a convoluted and amateurish plot—to plays with tight dramatic structures. They suc-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ceeded completely only twice, in *The Ascent of F6* and *On the Frontier*. *Dogskin* is important primarily for its few superb lyrics and the light it sheds on Auden's other work: the doomed lovers and neurotic society are all there, as are the secret self (Francis Crewe in a dog suit) and the mock-heroic quest; versions of the modern Leader represented onstage by a loudspeaker can also be found in *On the Frontier*, *For the Time Being* and the more benign *Paul Bunyan*; the Bedlam scene in *Dogskin* prefigures Auden's work in *The Rake's Progress*—in fact, anyone doubting the unity of Auden's *oeuvre* need only consider how often he recycled the same material.

In *The Ascent of F6* (1936), Auden and Isherwood hit on a dramatic structure with the mythic simplicity and resonance of opera. The mountain itself, representing the best and worst human aspirations (as well as its own inhuman immensity), rises above the muddled lives of unknown citizens and the machinations of governments. Michael Ransom, the "truly strong" man, is, like T.E. Lawrence, both inspiring and dangerous. His mountaineering expedition, undertaken partly for nationalistic purposes, is encouraged as well by his mother. It becomes both Ransom's own mystical quest and a nation's ritual sacrifice of its heroes. We see not only the tragic expedition, but also its seriocomic interpretation by the powers below:

> Mr. A. [*from stage box*] Why is my work so dull?
> GENERAL. That is a most insubordinate remark. Every man has his job in life, and all he has to think about is doing it as well as it can be done. What is needed is loyalty, not criticism. Think of those climbers up on F6. No decent food. No fires. No nice warm beds. Do you think *they* grumble? You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Ultimately the hero "has died / To satisfy our smug suburban pride," yet by following the struggle on the mountain itself, Auden and Isherwood manage to find some value, too, in the heroic act; Ransom's life has not been entirely wasted, despite its misuse by those who survive him.

Much has been made of Auden's political vision in the thirties, or what he and Isherwood in their "Preliminary Statement" called "The heroic self-immolation of a mistaken

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

society." But their depiction of a bipolar world weirdly anticipates the Cold War era. The last play Auden wrote with Isherwood, *On the Frontier* (1937–38), almost predicts the looking-glass war of John le Carré. *F6* had taught both playwrights the importance of having a visual metaphor in the set. Instead of a mountain, here they have the Ostnia-Westland Room, simultaneously inhabited by two enemy families who are unaware of each other and their nearly identical domestic lives. Auden dramatizes his lifelong obsession with the double man whose public and private selves conflict and pine for impossible unity. The public life is found in the war which devours both nations, the Shavian arms merchant who finds it good business and the pack of journalists lit like the witches in *Macbeth*. Isherwood had lost his father in World War I, and temporarily so had Auden, while his father was away in the Army. Here they show the devastating private effect of the war on families of both sides. As in his charade, Auden uses a pair of doomed lovers who learn that "We cannot choose our world, / Our time, our class. None are innocent, none." Finally, as they die, their souls speak with terrible irony of a New Jerusalem:

ANNA. Europe lies in the dark
City and flood and tree;
Thousands have worked and work
To master necessity.

ERIC. To build the city where
The will of love is done
And brought to its full flower
The dignity of man.

ANNA. Pardon them their mistakes,
The impatient and wavering will.
They suffer for our sakes,
Honour, honour them all.

ERIC. Dry their imperfect dust,
The wind blows it back and forth.
They die to make man just
And worthy of the earth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This duet could easily be found in an opera; it resembles some that Auden himself was to write. In his introduction to the *Plays*, Mendelson writes, "Against the conscious intent of its author, *On the Frontier* aspired to the condition of opera." I would argue that, despite their wordiness, nearly all of Auden's plays share this perhaps unconscious ambition. It is astonishing now to realize that both *The Ascent of F6* and *On the Frontier* were scored by Benjamin Britten, for whom Auden would write his first deliberate libretto. Given the success Britten and Auden achieved with individual lyrics and the belated recognition of their operetta, *Paul Bunyan*, I would love to hear the incidental music for these dramas. Mendelson reports that Britten also scored "The Rocking Horse Winner," the 1941 radio play Auden wrote with James Stern. Though the music has been lost, "a tape recording of the play can be obtained through the semi-clandestine market in recordings of radio broadcasts." Mendelson's notes abound in such information.

Paul Bunyan was the only libretto Auden wrote on his own, though before he began it in 1939 he had already fallen in love with his future collaborator, Chester Kallman. Lacking the more dramatic structure of *The Rake's Progress*, *Elegy for Young Lovers* and *The Bassarids*, *Bunyan* is still a delightful piece of musical theatre whose charms should not be underrated. Britten's music, an exuberant mix of folk song, light opera and Broadway show tune, finishes with a fabulous Christmas litany, and Auden's lyrics are as enjoyable as any he ever did (a recording by Phillip Brunelle and the Plymouth Music Series is available from Virgin Classics).

Written at the same time as his long didactic poem, *New Year Letter*, *Paul Bunyan* celebrates Auden's arrival in the United States, reflects an evolutionary vision of Western culture and meditates on freedom and responsibility in a democracy. The world Auden depicts here is mythical, almost cartoonish, a primordial forest in which "Revolution / Turns to rain" and a Western Union boy can cycle onstage with a telegram from Hollywood. Before Paul arrives, the only conflict we see is that between old and young trees. Then the geese sing of a new agent, man, who "dreams in order to act / And acts in order to dream." Auden has playfully hit on the essence of American aspiration:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It isn't very often the Conservatives are wrong,
Tomorrow normally is only yesterday again,
Society is right in saying nine times out of ten
Respectability's enough to carry one along.

But once in a while the odd thing happens,
Once in a while the dream comes true,
And the whole pattern of life is altered,
Once in a while the Moon turns Blue.

After a mild competition between lumbercamp cooks over the virtues of soup or beans, we encounter the dark side of American freedom; a Quartet of the Defeated sing, "America can break your heart."

Once again, Auden's characters are witty sketches, archetypes rather than full-blown portraits. Johnny Inkslinger is the feckless intellectual in America, forced (somewhat like Christopher Isherwood) to seek his fortune in Hollywood. Hot Biscuit Slim is the heroic tenor whose existential quest for identity occurs only in his introductory song:

In fair weather and in foul
Round the world and back,
I must hunt my shadow
And the self I lack.

Slim easily surmounts this conflict when he becomes infatuated with Paul's daughter, Tiny, and the two set course for Manhattan to run a hotel. Auden seems to shrug off the obsessions of the thirties, refreshed by a new start in America. Hel Helson's rebellion against Paul in Act Two provides the operetta's only real drama, and it is so quickly dispensed with that the danger hardly registers, yet I've heard the recording a dozen times and seen one live performance, and I continue to find *Paul Bunyan* joyful and moving. More than a musical revue, less than an opera, it's quirky and vibrant and wholly itself. Auden died thinking it a failure, but it's nothing of the sort.

The lack of dramatic conflict was not Auden's only mistake as a beginning librettist. In this published version of *Paul Bunyan*, Mendelson prints a witty love song for Johnny Inkslinger (whose love is for words) and a chorus of Lame Shadows and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Animas, which partly explain Auden's falling out with Britten; his verbal play becomes so complex here that a successful setting of the songs is hard to imagine. By the time Auden wrote his great oratorio, *For the Time Being*, which he hoped Britten would score, his wordiness and occasionally overbearing personality had defeated their collaboration. In 1942, Britten returned to England and looked ahead to other projects. Auden stayed on in America, turning his attention to longer poems like *The Sea and the Mirror* and *The Age of Anxiety*, and becoming a U.S. citizen in 1946.

When in 1947 Igor Stravinsky decided to compose an opera based on Hogarth's engravings and Auden was recommended (by Aldous Huxley) for the libretto, the poet brought along his protégé, Kallman, and a new partnership was born. Ever the apprentice, Auden had learned from his falling-out with Britten to strive for simplicity in lyrics intended to be set. Together with Kallman, he taught himself a spare dramatic structure suitable for opera, culminating in their radical simplification of Shakespeare for Nicholas Nabokov's *Love's Labour's Lost* (1969).

In conversation with Alan Ansen, Auden had said, "I've decided that opera represents the wilful display of emotions. And it's so odd how the characters always manage to fall in love with unsuitable people." *The Rake's Progress*, first performed in Venice in 1951, begins with a hopeful duet and ends in disaster for its two lovers. Tom Rakewell and Anne Trulove are doomed from the start by Rakewell's passive refusal of responsibility:

> Since it is not by merit
> We rise or we fall,
> But the favor of Fortune
> That governs us all,
> Why should I labor
> For what in the end
> She will give me for nothing
> If she be my friend?

Hardly a Don Giovanni, Tom Rakewell is duped into a Faustian bargain without even knowing what he has bargained away; his adversary, Nick Shadow, contrives his ruin in a sequence of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scenes corresponding to Hogarth's panels. Auden's most brilliant addition to Hogarth, the outlandish bearded woman Baba the Turk, becomes Tom's wife in Act Two. Rakewell's dissatisfaction is apparent the moment he leaves Anne, but he hasn't got the will to change his life. When he invests in Shadow's fraudulent bread machine, the dream of a mechanical paradise displacing the possibility of love, he hastens his own downfall.

At times Stravinsky's neoclassical score seems cold and detached. The austere melodies of his arias subvert a listener's desire for musical reassurance. Indeed, the emotional energies of the opera are so muted and deflated at its conclusion that ambivalence ensues, like the mistrust of musical forgiveness I alluded to in my opening. We are denied easy pleasures, enjoined by a chorus of madmen to "Leave all love and hope behind." This ending, fitting as it is for Hogarth's satire, is hardly mitigated by a jaunty Epilogue. If Rakewell had possessed Faust's desire for knowledge, if he had used wit to combat Shadow rather than a final game of chance, we might have felt less emptied at the end. Poor Rakewell is hammered by life, never quite knowing why he lived. His final madness is hardly less hopeful than his original love.

Auden reprinted Anne's final barcarolle in *The Shield of Achilles*, a book that concludes with another lyric, "Lauds," taken almost intact from the second libretto Auden and Kallman wrote for Stravinsky, *Delia* (1952). The composer disliked what they had written, and it was never set. Still, it's interesting to compare the quest motif here with that in their 1955 translation and revision of *The Magic Flute*. In *Delia*, the hero Orlando sings,

> O, mine own true love,
> My vision, then, was true;
> Far, far have I journeyed,
> Led by a dream of you. . . .

Tamino in *The Magic Flute* sings,

> Dream voices that I could not understand
> Called me and bade me leave my native land:
> By perilous and solitary ways,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Through forest, fen and desert many days
> My feet have wandered with uncertain aim,
> Driven by longings which I cannot name,
> Seeking I known not what.

What we have here are courtly versions of Hot Biscuit Slim, an Auden type dating back at least to Alan Norman in *The Chase*.

By the 1950s Auden had abandoned drama and the longer poem to focus much of his energy on opera, though there would still be the sequences of poems like "Bucolics," "Horae Canonicae" and "About the House." This is the late period when many critics declared him in decline, but I wonder whether the dissipation of verbal energy in some of Auden's late verse is not somehow related to his apprenticeship to opera. Peter Porter has complained that it is hard for the literary critic to know exactly what to say about the libretti (*TLS*, November 5, 1993). As verse they can seem thin; only with the music added can their full accomplishment be measured. Of the last three major operas in this edition—*Elegy for Young Lovers*, *The Bassarids* and *Love's Labour's Lost*—I can fairly judge only the second, having heard a good recording of it from the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Berlin. Nevertheless, the libretto of *Elegy* seems, on the page at least, exceedingly strong, especially considering that the story Auden and Kallman devised is completely original.

They met Hans Werner Henze on Ischia in 1953, and five years later he asked them to collaborate with him. Kallman wrote more than half of their new libretto, but many of its preoccupations—the doomed lovers, the dangers of a Romantic poet's egocentricity—seem especially Audenesque. It was Auden who wrote in Act Two, "What the world needs are warmer hearts, / Not older poets." Auden never believed that art was worth the destruction of other peoples' lives; he thought Romantic egotism a prelude to totalitarianism. In their "Genesis of the Libretto," Auden and Kallman wrote that the theme of their opera derived from Yeats's lines: "The intellect of man is forced to choose / Perfection of the life or of the work." Their poet, Gregor Mittenhofer, living on the slopes of his own Parnassus (the F6-like Hammerhorn) is a ruthless genius, a man who sacrifices other people to feed his poetry.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Their next opera, *The Bassarids* (1963), based on Euripides' *The Bacchae*, was even darker and more powerful. Auden's introduction to *The Portable Greek Reader* (1948) had made it clear how deeply he understood the bleak theology of the ancients, and poems like "The Shield of Achilles" linked that vision to a modern political despair. In *Secondary Worlds*, Auden discussed the eighteenth-century belief "that, in a conflict between Reason and Unreason, Reason was bound in the end to be victorious. So in *Die Zauberflöte* the Queen of the Night has a daughter, Pamina; Sarastro acquires a princely disciple, Tamino; the two young innocents fall in love, and the curtain falls upon preparations for their wedding." Euripides' *Bacchae*, he asserts, would hardly have been thought appropriate for opera at that time. But "Today we know only too well that it is as possible for whole communities to become demonically possessed as it is for individuals to go off their heads." Pentheus proves not only the "ungodly man" refusing to worship Dionysus, but a dangerous naif, ignorant of Unreason's all-pervasive power. Henze's music has a violent grandeur (lots of brass), and when Maenads pursue Pentheus we hear a strong rhythm in jazz percussion.

In fact, the opera is so intense that Auden wisely decided to break the tension with a lighter Intermezzo, a miniature eighteenth-century operetta on The Judgement of Calliope (unfortunately missing from my recorded version). When we return to Pentheus' story, he has realized too late the meaning of his own denial:

> I looked into eyes that were my own.
> A full red mouth was rounded on my music.
> It slavered like a bull's
> I was a faceless God
> And worshipped Pentheus.
>
> There stood my grief. It smiled at me.
> My lips were shaped on: "*You shall be forgotten.*"
> My front knees dropped. He whispered in my ear:
> "*Am I not pure? Say no.*"
>
> Biting my nape, he drove my flesh away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

[Tearing open his clothes at his chest, with a fully conscious cry of desperate grief.]

No! No! This flesh is me!

The powerful dénouement not only has Agave and Cadmus banished, but the Bassarids chillingly singing "Kneel. Adore" while a child smashes her doll at the foot of Semele's tomb. This is terrific opera; I can well understand why Mendelson calls it "the summit of Auden's art as a librettist."

A full appraisal of Auden's vast accomplishment has yet to be made, but the ongoing Princeton edition of *The Complete Works* will make such an appraisal possible for the first time. In that sense, Auden has been extremely well served by his editor and literary executor. Of the radio plays Mendelson has discovered and collected here, at least one, "The Dark Valley" (1940), is a masterpiece, a severe little monologue anticipating Beckett and Pinter, as well as the *The Bassarids*. In it a woman ruminates upon her life and the trouble of freedom while she tries to catch a goose in her yard. The goose, she says, is better off "to have a kind old woman to look after you and feed you and give you a nice coop to live in." The old woman's language is alternately comic, like Herod's in *For the Time Being*, and devastatingly bleak. When she has finished singing "Lady Weeping at the Crossroads" and caught the goose, the old woman sharpens her knife on a grindstone. "I'm sorry," she says, "but it has to be done. Life can't always be pleasant, can it? Geese have to hatch eggs, and grow fat. And old women have to sharpen knives. What for? Why? You may well ask, but who knows? Why are we alive? Why don't we die?"

By the time he wrote these words, Auden had returned to the church, but "The Dark Valley" finds little consolation in religion. He had yet to learn the most difficult lessons of his life from Kallman's betrayal, his mother's death, decades of lonely fame. As he revised his great verse, he grew to mistrust the intoxicating magic of poetry, developing a more casual and prosaic style, but we can be grateful that he never stopped collaborating with others, never stopped pushing himself into longer forms, never abandoned the stage as a public venue for his song.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MILLER WILLIAMS

Lay of the Badde Wyf

All that she did she did not aim to do.
What she did intentionally was talk.
She had a simple hunger to say something
and see a sign that what she said was heard
by someone else, who might say "well," or "maybe,"
or nothing at all, but have the look of someone
to whom some words had recently been directed.

Sometimes, at night, she could imagine words
dying inside of her, empty of all their meanings.

They came with coffee first, a few stray words,
then cup by cup she told her whole life,
such as it was. She was aware it wasn't
much of a life. And then he told her his.

He ran the dry cleaners and lived above it.
You couldn't say, he said, it's much of a home.

Home was where she watched the heavy hours,
each with its foggy number, grinding by.

She wanted once to work outside the home,
helping someone out somewhere for nothing.
Her husband said he would not hear of that.

She wanted once to have the kids by now.
Before the next promotion, though, and the next,
her husband would not hear of that at all.

She spent the day reading and running errands,
taking clothes to the cleaners and planning tomorrow,
paying bills and watching television.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She climbed the stairs repeatedly, to find
the same sweet talk and coffee every time.
Then one day she took a glass of wine.
Then when she let his finger trace her lips
she felt something fall that she couldn't catch,
the way you feel it when you've dropped a plate.
Inside a held breath you hear it break.
All you can say is, well, there goes a plate.

Not watching her body being let out to the light,
not talking, either, she thought about her husband,
and what she was doing, and how to carry the fact,
the knowledge of it home, to make it a part
of pancakes and bills and looking for car keys.

Then she smiled, lying back in the light of her thoughts,
suddenly seeing how ascending the stairs
and drinking the wine and being naked there
would surely be among the numberless things
he himself would say he'd never hear of.
So let him never hear, for who was she,
unfaithful wife, to doubt his wisdom now?

Clutter of Silence
(Invention for Two Voices)

You ought to see him there in the backyard
standing like a stump. About sundown,
he wanders out and tosses a rock or two.
A squirrel could nest in a pocket and he wouldn't know it.
He used to tell me what he'd done all day.
I'd let him talk then tell him how I felt,
the sun going down, but he would never listen.
The day his sister died he crashed the car
so he could know that he was feeling something.
Nothing seems real to him till he acts it out.
We haven't laid down for love in a long time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We didn't do it together when we did it.
Not really together, I mean, him looking down,
me looking up, the ceiling fan turning,
his body telling both of us when to stop.
Do I still love him? I'd like to say I do,
I worry about him when he has to travel.
I guess I'd worry about anybody
that shared a house with me for thirty years.
Does he love me, though, that might be the question.
He sits for hours without saying a word
and never likes anything I fix.

You ought to stand where I do, out in the yard.
Watch any window and there she'll be, in the bedroom,
lights off and on, the dining room and kitchen,
like if she sat for a second, something would get her.
She thinks I don't pay attention but I do.
When I get home from work I always ask her
what did you do today, and she says, nothing.
Doing, doing, all the time doing
and never telling me what she does.
She gained ten pounds of grief when her mother died.
That's when it came to me like a bumper sticker,
her flesh is just feelings in disguise.
It never had a purpose all its own.
We've come to not make love much anymore.
She doesn't care and I can live without it.
We did it once the way the movies do it,
but then she started watching the ceiling fan.
Do I love her? Who else could I love
if I don't love her? We're talking thirty years.
You could turn the question around to her
who gets mad with no warming up
and puts oregano on everything.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Tenth Anniversary Photograph, 1952

Look at their faces. You know it all.
They married the week he left for the war.
Both are gentle, intelligent people,
as all four of their parents were.

They've never talked about much
except the children. They love each other
but never wondered why they married
or had the kids or stayed together.

It wasn't because they knew the answers.
They had never heard the questions
that twisted through the jokes to come
of Moses and the Ten Suggestions.

They paid their debts and never doubted
God rewarded faith and virtue
or when you got out of line
had big and little ways to hurt you.

People walked alone in parks.
Children slept in their yards at night.
Most every man had a paying job,
and black was black and white was white.

Would you go back? Say that you can,
that all it takes is a wave and a wink
and there you are. So what do you do?
The question is crueler than you think.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Living Will

I now, being of sound and light aware
and busily here but planning not to stay,
ask on behalf of a man who will use my name
that nobody when he is leaving get in the way,
forcing minutes and hours into his veins,
getting their long needs confused with his.
There is a time to think of who we are,
to call a thing precisely what it is.

When he's not his anymore, if there are things
in working order, take them as small goodbyes.
Maybe the nose. He has smelled the crocus
under snow. Not those poor ears or eyes.
He won't care, but bits of him scattered around
will say that he did, if anyone cares to know.

Don't let him hurt a lot if you can help it.
Otherwise, be pleased to let him go.
When all the signs point off to you-know-what,
clear him a path. If he should need a hand,
he will appreciate it a whole lot
if somebody gives him one—if not as a friend,
for simple reason or pity, then only to watch him
twisting free of the same loosening knot
that holds you to your bones, in case you forgot.

On the Sacrifice of a Siamese Twin at Birth

We are one but we intended two.
Together, together we would surely have died.
Or worse, lived. Now one of us, one of us may.
But pity the hand whose closing scissors decide.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Naipaul's Written World

V.S. Naipaul's twenty-second book is an occasion for looking over his extraordinary career and considering how much it weighs and what parts of it weigh most.[1] That he hasn't yet won the Nobel Prize is continuing matter for speculation and doubtless has to do with his outspoken airings of prejudices that are insufficiently liberal. Reviewing the new book's predecessor, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), Derek Walcott—a Nobel winner—both praised it as writing and deplored Naipaul's disdainful attitudes toward black people and the West Indian world. Even so, said Walcott, Trinidadians had large enough hearts to forgive him for choosing England as the place of authority and tradition from which other places were judged and found wanting. One has the sense, then, of Naipaul as a politically incorrect figure whose views on things political count more than does his art as a writer (though everybody says he "writes well"), to the extent that the art has not been properly examined and evaluated.[2]

In particular one wants to ask about the sort of novelist we have on our hands. *A Way in the World*, like *The Enigma of Arrival*, insists on its title page that it is a novel. Yet by no stretch of my imagination can either book be called a novel in any but the loosest and most unhelpful sense. Randall Jarrell's witty definition of the genre as a prose work of some length that has something wrong with it, will hardly do to characterize *A Way in the World*. Unlike *Enigma*, which concentrated obsessively and minutely on the narrator's life in a Wiltshire cottage over a period of years, the new book has no unifying thread of time or place; nor is its nine-part scheme of biographical reminiscence,

[1] A WAY IN THE WORLD, by *V.S. Naipaul.* Alfred A. Knopf. $23.00.

[2] On Naipaul as politically incorrect I can say that some years ago there was talk of inviting him to lecture at the college where I teach. Three members of the English department objected on the grounds that he was racist, sexist, and homophobic, all rolled into one. The invitation never materialized.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

historical fable, and portraiture of imaginary-real figures, consistently "voiced" in such a way as to assure us we can trust the narrator. Sink or swim, is more like it, and a number of times I sank.

You could say that Naipaul began as a writer of novels and late in his career has become a writer of "novels." (The English edition of *A Way in the World* calls it a "sequence," which is safe enough.) In what to my taste was the most engaging section of this sequence, "Passenger: A Figure from the Thirties," Naipaul recounts his relationship with an English writer he calls Foster Morris, who encouraged Naipaul at the beginning of his career as a novelist. In 1937 Morris had written a book about Trinidad centering on a strike in the oilfields and on the leader of the strike, a preacher named Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler. In "Passenger," Naipaul (we scarcely need to call him "the narrator") praises Morris' book for the way it depicted Trinidad people "with the utmost seriousness," treating them without irony, as if they were English. But, adds Naipaul, well-intentioned as *The Shadowed Livery* was it was also wrong, since it suppressed "the sense of the absurd, the idea of comedy"—the "preserver," Naipaul calls it. His own earliest efforts at fiction, in which he attempted to use English settings and people encountered after he settled in London in 1956 were, he soon decided, misconceived, since they suppressed his comic inheritance. The comedy inherited was a double one, from his story-telling Hindu family and from the street life in Port of Spain. More than once he has described how his true direction became apparent to him one afternoon when, sitting in the offices of the BBC for whom he was an occasional worker, he wrote the opening paragraphs of the opening story in what would be *Miguel Street* (his third published book, though the first to be written):

> Every morning when he got up Hat would sit on the banister of his back verandah and shout across, "What happening there, Bogart?"
>
> Bogart would turn in his bed and mumble softly, so that no one heard, "What happening there, Hat?"

In Naipaul's "Prologue to an Autobiography" (in *Finding the Center,* 1984) he writes about this opening that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> The first sentence was true, the second was invention. But together—to me, the writer—they had done something extraordinary. Though they had left out everything—the setting, the historical time, the racial and social complexities of the people of the street—they had suggested it all; they had created the world of the street. And together, as sentences, words, they had set up a rhythm, a speed, which dictated all that was to follow.

Of note in this portrait of the artist by himself, is Naipaul's confident assumption that the difference between truth and invention is perfectly clear, and that the account given here of his beginnings as a writer is obviously true, not invented.

Naipaul's emphasis on the pace and idiom of comedy, with its roots in local observation and its dependence on artfully combined sentences and words, surely characterizes with accuracy the feel of the stories in *Miguel Street* and—even more satisfying—his first two novels, *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) and *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958). In *The Mystic Masseur*, Ganesh—the struggling masseur who turns himself into a famous writer and healer—observes a shop notice written by Leela, his bride-to-be, who is being recommended to Ganesh by her father, Ramlogan:

> "Is Leela self who write that," Ramlogan said. "I didn't ask she to write it, mind you. She just sit down quiet quiet one morning after tea and write it off."
>
> It read:
>
> NOTICE:
>
> Notice, is. Hereby; provided: That, Seats!
> Are, Provided. For; Female: Shop, Assistants!
>
> Ganesh said, "Leela know a lot of punctuation marks."
>
> "That is it, sahib. All day the girl just sitting down and talking about these punctuation marks. She is like that, sahib."

Later, to the surprise of those around him, Ganesh writes his first book, titled *A Hundred and One Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion*, which contains sticklers such as number 46, "Who is the greatest modern Hindu?" (Ans. Mahatma Gandhi) and 47, "Who is the second greatest modern Hindu?" (Ans. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru) and 48, "Who is the third greatest modern Hindu?" (Ans. not revealed to us). Ramlogan is de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lighted: "Is the sort of book, sahib, they should give to children in school and make them learn it by heart."

The idiom is as memorable as the inventive comedy it conveys: Ganesh's aunt is known by him as "The Great Belcher" for reasons of her expressive dyspepsia; Ramlogan says that having to look after himself since he was five years old has given him "cha'acter and sensa values, sahib. That's what it gives me. Cha'acter and sensa values." In *The Suffrage of Elvira*, about a political campaign in one of Trinidad's first free elections, the tone is even broader and more farcical, with many fine scenes, one of which involves a dead chicken that someone lays squarely in the middle of Ramlogan's doorway, just after he has luxuriously rubbed himself with Canadian Healing Oil (the "Canadian" touch is especially good in this Caribbean venue). When one of the characters is told by his son that the son will no longer support his father's candidate in the election, the older man doesn't attempt to argue with him since "You is a big man. Your pee making froth." Many further examples of a living idiom could be adduced as proof of the way, in Naipaul's retrospective phrase about it, "the world of the street" has been created.

The "Passenger" section from Naipaul's new work throws interesting light on how he sees the relation between his first three "street" books and what is generally acknowledged to be his masterwork, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), by any standards among the major novels of our century. Naipaul tells us that though his early way of writing had given him confidence and gotten him started, by 1960 or thereabouts he had begun to be bothered by its "jokeyness," a humor that seemed to lie "on the other side of hysteria," just as did the colonial society he had written about. He says—it must be in reference to *Mr. Biswas*, though he doesn't name it directly—that he was "absolutely secure in this new book" which was taking him much longer to finish than the previous ones. And although the six hundred pages of *Biswas* contain much comedy—especially in the verbal inventiveness of the protagonist's name-calling of his Tulsi in-laws—and much fiercely sardonic humor in Mr. Biswas' struggle with the world's stupidities and follies, the novel frequently takes on a deeper note. Mr. Biswas could be said to exist, like the comedy Naipaul had become adept at creating, on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the other side of hysteria or anxiety, that "deeper root of comedy" that had become this novelist's subject. Biswas suffers a major nervous collapse during the book as well as countless smaller defeats and depressions; so when Naipaul provides him with a momentary vision of self-possession, of peace, the effect on a reader is strong and satisfying, as in this memory of morning in Port of Spain:

> The newspaper, delivered free, still warm, the ink still wet, sprawled on the concrete steps down which the sun was moving. Dew lay on trees and roofs; the empty street, freshly swept and washed, was in cool shadow, and water ran clear in the gutters whose green bases had been scratched and striped by the sweepers' harsh brooms.

Or this moment, in his final dwelling place two weeks before he dies:

> He thought of the house as his own, though for years it had been irretrievably mortgaged. And during these months of illness and despair, he was struck again and again by the wonder of being in his own house, the audacity of it; to walk in through his own front gate, to bar entry to whoever he wished, to close his doors and windows every night, to hear no noises except those of his family, to wander freely from room to room, and about his yard . . .

A House for Mr. Biswas is invariably called "Dickensian" by critics, as I suppose any big book teeming with characters (many of them caricatures), disdaining economy of effort and moving always toward expansion, determined to leave nothing out, could be so called. But except for the reflective gravity of some of the narrative in *Great Expectations*, Dickens, whose "jokeyness" is always cropping up, contains little of the sustained depths and glooms that lie not very far beneath Mohun Biswas' story.

Having published, at age twenty-nine, a novel containing as much life as did *Mr. Biswas*, what was Naipaul to do next? A possibility, frequently made use of by English novelists of this century, was to travel, then write up your travels: accordingly Naipaul went back to the Caribbean, then to India, and produced absorbing accounts of these places in *The Middle Passage* (1962) and *An Area of Darkness* (1964). But while in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

India he also wrote, one presumes fairly rapidly, the oddest and in some ways most delightful book of his career, *Mr. Stone and the Knights' Companion*, the one novel of his set wholly in England and with English characters. To those familiar with Naipaul's other fiction, both early and late, *Mr. Stone* reads like a ventriloquist's performance, as if Muriel Spark or Elizabeth Taylor were at the controls. The tone and irony of the novel is delicate and mischievous, with yearning and melancholy in it was well. It was if Naipaul were saying, if you think I'm merely a regionalist entertainer, let me show you what I can do as well or better than any contemporary English novelist. By the same token, it was something only to be done once.

Naipaul's decline as a novelist—or at least his metamorphosis into a very different, and to my eyes less appealing, one—began with the award-winning *The Mimic Men* (1967). His first novel in the first person, it is an example of what Henry James, speaking of that mode, called "the terrible fluidity of self-revelation." Whether we are meant to identify the narrator, one Ralph Singh, with Naipaul, or whether Singh is the object of authorial irony, is impossible to determine. What is damagingly evident is that comedy has been thoroughly laid aside in favor of Singh's largely toneless recitation of his career in London, his childhood in the Caribbean, his marriage and its dissolution, his decision to write a memoir. Instead of comedy, we have endless assertion and declaration (the book is only 250 pages long but feels much longer). Nothing is dramatized; the mode of presentation is as flat and uninflected as Singh's life seems to have been. Here for the first time we see Naipaul—as he characterized himself in a recent *New Yorker* profile—as a hater of "style" in prose: "I want the writer not to be there . . . In my writing there's no self-consciousness, there's no beauty." He says in the profile he is against "smoothness," against rhythm, against Santayana and Gibbon and the King James Bible ("Unbearable—*unbearable*"); he is against plot (Trollope would be all right if he weren't always plotting); he is in favor of Richard Jeffries and William Cobbett as admirable nineteenth-century writers, rather than Jane Austen and Henry James. Although these prejudices don't express themselves fully in his writing until the last two "novels," they begin to be felt in *The Mimic Men* and in the three political novels of the 1970s which followed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In 1974, the year before the second of these books, *Guerillas*, was published (*In a Free State* appeared in 1971, *A Bend in the River* in 1979), Naipaul wrote an essay about Joseph Conrad in which, rather tortuously, he delineated his relation to that writer. As criticism, it is a curious performance: "An Outpost of Progress," an early Conrad story, is designated "the finest thing Conrad wrote," while "The Lagoon" (also an early story) provided Naipaul with something "strong and direct" that he was never again to find in Conrad. By contrast, *Lord Jim*, *The Secret Agent*, *Under Western Eyes*, and *Victory* are in their different ways unsatisfactory, and he couldn't finish *Nostromo*. Yet, and this is the burden of the essay, Naipaul eventually discovers that Conrad has been there before him: that Naipaul's desire to make a romantic career for himself as a writer was doomed to fail, since the world had changed:

> The new politics, the curious reliance of men on institutions they were yet working to undermine, the simplicity of belief and the hideous simplicity of actions, the corruption of causes, half-made societies that seemed doomed to remain half-made: these were the things that began to preoccupy me.

This had been Conrad's experience, and Naipaul attempted to match it, he says, by losing "one's preconceptions of what the novel should do and, above all, to rid oneself of the subtle corruptions of the novel or comedy of manners." These words are extremely revealing: the corruption of causes, of half-made societies, of "politics," necessitates something different from the subtle corruptions of fiction. If "novel" equals "comedy of manners," then it can't relevantly deal with politics. Perhaps Naipaul believes that Conrad's austerity and lack of comedy were also to be emulated; yet *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* are full of a sardonic humor directed at institutions and at "the hideous simplicity of actions." Indeed you might even say that in them Conrad came closest to writing the comedy of manners, and they are perhaps the novels of his that wear best.

What I find disturbing in Naipaul's political novels from the 1970s is a tonelessness at their center; an absence of narrative performance—of "style" if you will—that novels have not often tried to do without. Bent on displaying the corruption of causes in African and Caribbean "half-made societies," these books do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so at the price of readerly pleasure. Even admirers of them might admit that they're not much fun to read; for Naipaul has deliberately moved beyond the "fun" that was so importantly a part of his pre-*Mimic Men* fiction. Taking the long view, we see that this was the way he had to go—to "develop": yet such development exacts its price. *Mr. Biswas* will be read when *Guerillas* is barely remembered, because the earlier book is art, the later one closer to a cautionary tale told in icy, noncommittal prose that doesn't admit any mixed feelings.

With *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*, Naipaul has ceased to write novels in favor of densely meditative prose excursions, linked together through something other than story ("Yes, oh, dear, yes, the novel tells a story," squeaked E.M. Forster). Or put it that the story has been internalized and historicized into something presumably deeper and more profound than a mere piece of fiction. In the *New Yorker* interview, Naipaul spoke of himself as a man who weighs his words, doesn't just say what comes into his head, and that therefore his books demand special treatment: "My paragraphs are very rich—they have to be read. Many things are happening in the paragraph. If you miss a paragraph—if you miss a page—it's hard to get back into it." He thinks that "twenty good pages" at a stretch is about as much as a careful reader of him can manage. *The Enigma of Arrival* contains a hundred or so rich pages ("The Journey") describing Naipaul's leaving Trinidad and early sojourn in England. But the rest of the book, centered on the manor-cottage life he lived in Wiltshire, is not so rich as it is labored. The assumption behind his remark about weighing words carefully is that a writer who does so will be neither vain nor prolix. Yet the minutiae of observation and speculation, the teasing out of the people and places that surround him—done without humor, largely without irony in *Enigma*—constitute an obstacle course that can be traversed only with much effort and frequent stops along the way. Naipaul's power and authority as a writer is such that to admit to failure on a reader's part, to lapse into inattention or boredom, makes for a guilty sense of inadequacy. Isn't there something really *deep* here that, if I were a better reader, I could discover?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the basis of *A Way in the World*, I'd have to say—not necessarily. As with *Enigma*, the best parts of it are distinctly autobiographical: early memories ("A Smell of Fish-glue") of administrative work in the Red House in Port of Spain; the aforementioned sequence with Foster Morris; and at least part of the section about the revolutionary Lebrun (a C.L.R. James-like figure). But much of the book is devoted to what Naipaul calls "unwritten stories," three of them, one of which is about Sir Walter Raleigh in his old age coming back to Trinidad, still occupied with the fading possibility of an El Dorado to be discovered up the Orinoco; another, even longer, story is about the career of the Venezuelan revolutionary, Francisco Miranda, a late eighteenth-century precursor of Simon Bolivar. By calling them unwritten stories, Naipaul, it seems to me, bids to disarm us by deconstructing the business of writing fiction (these are not "stories," you understand, not "written" in the usual sense), then taking the liberty to spin out at some length combinations of imaginative-historical embroidery. But their power to make us ask the crucial narrative question—what happened next?—is too often absent, with the effect that they feel, in the main, contrived and willed—interesting ideas that end up being overwritten rather than unwritten.

A Way in the World is a strange book, and though it has been called (along with *Enigma*) Proustian, there seems to me a huge difference between the densely psychological, often playful-painful exploration Proust gives his narrator, and what Naipaul does to the "I" in the presumably more autobiographical sections of the new work. A single instance will have to do to show what I mean and why it's a problem. In the section dealing with the revolutionary Lebrun ("On the Road"), Naipaul is invited to a dinner in London for the man at which West Indian food is served—a dish called "coo-coo" or "foo-foo" consisting of "a heavy glistening mound" of yams and green bananas and peppers. Repelled by it, Naipaul leaves it on his plate (no one noticed, he tells us). Eight pages later he is in New York City, again at dinner with friends of Lebrun with whom he has been put in touch. The host has promised him that gefilte fish will be served, a "special dish," which Naipaul says he's never had. When it appears this is what happens:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> I didn't like the way it looked, and have no memory of it. The idea of something pounded to paste, then spiced or oiled, worked on by fingers, brought to mind something of hand lotions and other things. I became fearful of smelling it. I couldn't eat it. With the coo-coo or foo-foo in the Maida Vale flat I had been able to hide what I did to the things on my plate. That couldn't be done here; everyone knew that the gefilte fish had been specially prepared for Lebrun's friend from London.
>
> Manners never frayed. Conversation revived. But the embarrassment that began in the dining room lasted until I was taken back to the Manhattan hotel.

This is as much as we are told. What is the meaning of it and why should it be presented as imaginatively significant? We know that Naipaul is an extremely fastidious man, a strict vegetarian, prey to disgust at certain kinds of culinary treats. And that he is as fastidious about what he writes (he weighs the words) as about what he eats. But for the life of me I can't see anything more to this passage than that gefilte fish didn't pass his scrutiny and embarrassment ensued. What does this have to do with Lebrun, or with the world about which Naipaul moves with such deliberate complication? By banishing irony and humor, the staple of comedy of manners and of a certain kind of novel, Naipaul has put himself out there on a limb with little besides his righteous, proud sense of himself as a man of integrity. Too often, in *A Way in the World*, that's all we're left with, and it feels flat, merely asserted. This is by way of saying that the new book (a strong bid for the Nobel?) is not the crown, but a curious outgrowth rather, of his distinguished writing life.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JAMES LAUGHLIN

The Search

She writes that she cannot
Find me in her dreams. She
Has been searching for me
Night after night but with
No success. "Why are you
Hiding from me," she asks,
"Did I do something to
Offend you, to hurt you?
I think you must have
Misunderstood what was
Meant as a sign of love."

Look further, look deeper,
I write her. Don't abandon
The search too easily. I
Have encountered *you* in
My dreams, often you have
Been with me, beautiful
As you always were, your
Voice the same, unchanged.

But what difference does
It make where we meet as
Long as we're together?
The dream-world is vast;
It has many passageways
That lead to corners no
One has visited. So what
Does it matter where we
Meet there, or if we are
Now so insubstantial? We
Still speak the words we
Know, the words of love.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

De Contemptu Mortis

What is consciousness that it
Leaves us when most we need it
To save what little we have
Managed to construct? Will the
Pale torch of loving soon be
Sputtering out for me? The
Children joke at table whether
Grandfather should be buried
Or burned. What difference
Could it make? Does their humor
Mask any affection that will
Last when life takes them by
Their little necks and shakes
Them as it can, rich or poor?
Tell me a happy fable that
Off in a distant galaxy some
Creature with three eyes is
Watching over me. That can't
Be so, believe me, it's not so;
Walk up or down, turn right
Or left, it isn't so. We came,
We breathed a bit of air, we go.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PATRICIA GOEDICKE

Hero

the one holding her up

struggles in the water
stumbles

on patches of mud, soggy
weeds underfoot

what if she got right down there
with him

what if he wouldn't let her

one of them has to be the stubborn one
the other has to be stubborn too

do they get in each other's way
yes they get in each other's way

he thinks she drinks too much
she thinks he eats too much

he stands on the sore foot
she kicked

accidentally, under white sheets

though he thinks she's terrific
splashing around up there

lightheaded triumphant
in loud air

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she wishes she could be with him

wrestling whatever secrets
he won't talk about down there

streams of young women
and young men pour into the pond

he plays poker with them
then solves their lives for them

amid much laughter

he talks to his friends long distance
for hours

she wants to know everything they say

but what's going on
really he keeps

underwater

his real name is a darkness
he thinks

nobody should know

with so many people standing
on his shoulders

how high he's climbed
he won't admit ever

no matter how she kisses him
he just makes up limericks

stabs his fingers at red lights
to go green and they do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he solves her life too

gradually she begins to look around
for her own secrets gingerly

points her pocket
flashlight at a few

she knows heroes need
never to stop struggling

but can't bear it that he won't

pride himself on the sun
he shines on everyone

when she puts him on her shoulders
he squirms

let me get down
where I belong

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT HILL LONG

Diaspora

Just after midnight she came, I lifted my face
to her mouth and came, she was falling when the wave
pushed through her, falling into the next wave
and through, slipping out from my weight,
settling into her sag in the bed. The fume
of left-over Riesling on the headboard woke me.
Stars pulsed at the open window, white heartbeats.
I watched her contours emerge in gradations
of dark: released for the rest of the night,
no longer wife or mother or administrator,
no longer even her name. Now she was sleep,
a foreign country six inches away, and I was
insomnia. I drank the wine. A burnt-leaf tang
of fall came through the window. *Insomnia.* I sat up.

The neighbor's collie began barking along
the invisible perimeter of its electronic collar,
barking over the same thing sleep exhaled across
its border: *insomnia.* Insomnia kept saying
its name in my head, like a family failing to say
amen in unison. The more it failed, the more
the collie shredded *insomnia*'s syllables,
scattering pieces in the dark. Out of *insomnia*'s
echolalia, out of its tearing apart in the teeth
of a dog, another word was emerging, and the word
was *diaspora. Diaspora*: as soon as it came,
it began to fall apart. *Diaspora*'s unison broke
into three sounds—*die, ass, spore*—falling
at different speeds, in changing order,
and from the sounds images fell. My wife's ass,
luminous, pushing against my hipbone on the sheet.
Puffs of dust rising from an earth-star I poked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with a twig, expelling millions of genetic diagrams,
its base peeled back like foreskin. A wave
of people prostrated, as though praying,
into a depth prepared for them, a trench,
a ditch. Most knelt in underwear. Their noise
of mouths and bodies kept breaking *diaspora*
into smaller pieces and that breakage competed
with a new noise, sharper, like barking
but more ordered: more like carpenters framing
a house, or teenagers practicing drumrolls
and drill patterns on a ballfield in fall.

The odor of ash was coming on strong as the barking.
The dog's master, my neighbor through the birch woods,
is a selectman, and permits himself to burn leaves
while the rest of us bag and drag ours off
to the dump—or his woods, when he's not looking.
Maybe it was the ash-and-fog odor that made
his collie jumpy, not the inhuman whine
its collar emits when it strays into the woods.
Maybe the earth does know the difference
between the descent of fungal spores
among birch leaves and loam, and the sound
a girl's body makes, rolled into a ditch
full of uncles and cousins. Maybe the grass
is a remembrancer, as Whitman claimed, a flag
woven from beards of old men and tongues
of dead infants, its unconditional silence
permitting sleep to machine-gunners,
to administrators with alpha-lists and timetables.

By then the ditch stretched out before me.
I understood nothing prayed or barked out
on either side. It made no difference where
I placed myself: behind the gunners, among bodies
at the bottom, or with the ones waiting to be
pushed to the edge. Hardest was to watch
the children taking off their shoes. As long
as I couldn't sleep I stayed with the children,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kneeling in wet grass, helping the younger ones
undo laces and straps. I kept removing shoes,
piling them behind me—too tired to lift my head
for even a glimpse of the faces—then there were
no more shoes, only feet pausing at my hands,
parting and then pushing past me; I felt dizzy,
about to fall backwards, and grabbed at an ankle,
a foot, but it was like grabbing at a wave,
it was sleep, the sleep I'd wanted all night,
coming through the children for me; it brushed
my eyelids, my arms fell limp, my mouth was falling
open and a surge of small bodies carried me down.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HELEN CONKLING

The Oboe Teacher

Mr. Morosini, a widower, lived alone
in his Chicago apartment on the Near North Side.
He taught scales, arpeggios, and each week
assigned another of the *Forty Progressive Melodies*
by A.M.R. Barret, first oboe
of the Italian Opera, Covent Garden.
"A big shot," he said.

Always before the lesson I soaked my reed
in a glass of water so it would vibrate.
"Use water, not whiskey," said Mr. Morosini
who thought that was funny.
"Poor fingers," he said, when I made mistakes.
Maybe we soak *them* in whiskey."

He was old, Italian. I was fourteen, a beginner.
He had a lot to tell me: how to project,
how to support the tone with the muscles of the stomach.
"Very important, the muscles of the stomach."

After two years I could play the solo from *Swan Lake*
to his satisfaction, and he complimented me:
my high notes were still weak but my intonation was good
and my middle register was getting stronger.

I will never forget this, I thought,
hearing him play Mozart for the first time
all the way through without stopping, and up to tempo.
He believed music was bestowed on us by a power.

When the lessons were over, we drank tea and ate Ritz
crackers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the kitchen where canaries sang. He told about
his student days at the Paris Conservatory,
practicing seven hours a day, developing his technique
until at last he could play out of the fullness of his heart.

Sometimes we ate ice-cream.
And to celebrate certain special occasions—
the liberation of Paris, Debussy's birthday—
would drink out of small green glasses made in Venice,
a tablespoon of imported, pre-war Amaretto.
He said music came from another world.
He said everyone was born worthy.
He said there will always be someone who is better than you.
He said never mind.

The Soul of a Dead Bat

Yes, I am attractive.
Am still as I lie down there
beside the road to the lake.
You can fold and open my wings
if you want to. Go ahead.
And notice the fur on my body,
how it extends, wonderfully soft
and brown all the way to my feet.

Mine was a natural death.
Sudden but natural. I'm glad to say
I was not a prey. That would have been painful.
Simply, my heart fluttered, skipped a beat,
then stopped. I felt nothing.

I had a way of flying—a curving-out flutter—
that was my joy while I lived in the dark
under the moon, and I never dislodged
one single leaf, or moss spore, or hair as I flew.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Show me a bird who can say that!

My bodily functions have ceased.
I can tell by the expression on your face
how touched you are by that.
I am touched, myself, now that I think of it,
for I was the ornament of air
among the watergleams, sound gleams.
Gaze at me all you want to now. Take your time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FLOYD SKLOOT

Sourwood Nocturne

August nights the sourwood droops
with creamy white flowers that come
and go as though the dark of fall

were pure illusion. Walking some
nights on a deer trail that loops
the hillside, we can believe all

we hope for is present in one
deep breath. Then a moment
later is September. The slight

sourwood leaves turn such brilliant
scarlet it seems summer sun
still smolders in the tree's heart.

This high the evening light runs
toward December in a large wash
of blues, translucent as time

tightens and the air grows harsh.
Something moves behind us, a summons
within the wind. We turn toward home.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RICHARD HORNBY

The Guthrie Theatre

THE GUTHRIE THEATRE IN MINNEAPOLIS changed the American theatre forever. The great Irish-born director Tyrone Guthrie was devoted to three ideals, which he applied in Britain, Canada, and finally the United States: First, to a regional, nonprofit theatre, in contrast to the prevalent, centralized commercial theatre of London or New York ("a murderous, vulgar jungle"); second, to the artistic superiority of the thrust stage; and third, to updated, offbeat productions of the classics. When the Guthrie Theatre, named in his honor, was built in 1963, all three were unusual notions in the United States; today they are standard, although the last now frequently includes textual alterations, which Guthrie opposed.

The Guthrie Theatre is modeled on his earlier Stratford Festival Theatre in Ontario, which Guthrie developed with the designer and theatre architect Tanya Moiseiwitsch. Both use polygonal, stepped stages jutting into a steeply banked auditorium, and both originally had small permanent stagehouses up center, forcing entrances to either side of it, so that placement of actors tends to be off center and their movement on the diagonals. This reflected not only Guthrie's belief in natural, informal blocking for Shakespeare's plays and other classics, but also his abhorrence of the star system; the star's traditional move to center stage was frustrated architecturally.

The Guthrie Theatre was smaller than the one in Stratford, with 1400 seats as opposed to 2500, yet it was still among the largest in the nation for non-musical plays. Nevertheless, like its Stratford predecessor, the Guthrie provided a remarkable feeling of intimacy, with no audience member more than 60 feet from the stage, another benefit of thrust staging. With the audience on three sides, there was a reduction of scenic possibilities (especially of realistic illusion, which Guthrie also opposed), but costuming, three-dimensional set pieces, and, especially, lighting, could all create visual splendor of a formal, abstract variety.

Tyrone Guthrie's productions in Minneapolis in the 1960s included a famous *Hamlet* in modern evening dress, a graceful *Three Sisters* (one of the first productions of Chekhov ever done on a non-proscenium stage), and an ahistorical production of *The Oresteia* entitled *The House of Atreus*. After Guthrie's departure, his place was taken by his assistant Douglas Campbell, then by Michael Langham, and finally in the 1980s by the Romanian-born director Liviu Ciulei. Finding the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stage at the Guthrie smaller than the European ones he was used to, Ciulei removed the stagehouse, which greatly increased the playing area, but which shifted action further from the audience and made it much more centrally oriented. Acoustics suffered, which, along with the greater distances, led to a loss of intimacy.

In 1986, Ciulei was succeeded by Garland Wright, who continues today. Wright is talented, and has chosen varied, stimulating plays (aided by the company's first-rate dramaturg, Michael Lupu), but has kept Ciulei's architectural modifications, which have changed the Guthrie from being primarily an actors' theatre (in the best sense, promoting not star personality acting but character work of a high order) into a designers' theatre.

Design elements were certainly predominant in last summer's production of Aphra Behn's Restoration Comedy *The Rover*, directed by JoAnne Akalaitis, recently jettisoned as Artistic Director of the New York Shakespeare Festival. Akalaitis is a quirky but talented director (her firing in New York was the result of her administrative rather than artistic shortcomings), whose productions of the classics are fashionably flamboyant, but reflect a better understanding of text than that of most directors today; in this, she is similar to Tyrone Guthrie himself. Her production of *The Rover*, with costumes by Gabriel Berry and sets by George Tsypin, was eclectic to an extreme; basically seventeenth-century garb was counterpointed by Victoria's Secret lingerie, Carmen Miranda outfits, a miniskirted wedding dress, or a man in a modern suit and sunglasses, carrying a walky-talky. There were masks, a giant puppet, a scene placed in a public toilet (fancifully inspired by the line, "This house is haunted sure—'tis strangely furnished"), flamboyant swordplay, and a Spanish flamenco dance—performed to a modern Italian popular song. Most outrageously of all, Akalaitis sometimes ran a huge, translucent scarlet curtain down the middle of the stage, splitting it in half, and thus befogging the action for audience members at the sides (which, at the Guthrie, means the majority of them). I frequently wanted to scream, "More matter and less art!," but actually the fevered staging did not obscure the play, in some ways actually enhancing it.

Aphra Behn (1640?–89) is interesting to us today as a successful Restoration playwright, the first woman ever to make her living from writing. Her plays disappeared from the stage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (like most plays of her day) because of their sexual frankness, but have been promoted by modern feminists, including Virginia Woolf. *The Rover* gets performed frequently today, not only because it is charming and funny, but because it actually has a feminine (though not feminist) viewpoint. Adapted from an earlier play by Thomas Killigrew, it has a standard Restoration comedy plot: the rake on the make. During the exile of Charles II, three banished cavaliers—"The Rover" Willmore, and his friends Belvile and Frederick—meet in Naples (Akalaitis moved this to Spain—more or less) at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carnival time. Belvile is in love with Florinda, the eldest of three local sisters, but their love faces two hurdles: her father intends her for an elderly nobleman, while her brother wants her to marry his friend, the viceroy's son. The three women disguise themselves for the Carnival celebrations, and go off to look for men, Florinda specifically hoping to find Belvile.

The stage is thus set for considerable intrigue, assignations, duels, and trickery. Needless to say, it all ends happily; a rape is averted, duels yield only one minor wound, and each woman gets married to her suitable cavalier. The rape scene is the most unusual, and intriguing, of the play: Willmore, drunk, comes upon Florinda, alone, and pursues her by conditioned reflex, using flattery, sophistry ("There will be no sin in't, because 'twas neither designed nor premeditated: 'tis pure accident on both sides"), money, passion, and finally brute force, all in the course of about two minutes. The rape is prevented by the arrival of his two friends, but not before we have seen traditional Restoration Comedy gallantry through a woman's eyes; Willmore's sexual voraciousness is neither admirable nor funny, as it is always depicted by the male playwrights of the time. Behn does not make her women sexless, like those pure literary heroines of the Victorian era, pursued by heartless seducers; it is clear from the outset that the sisters are sexually adventuresome themselves. But their sexuality is genuine, while Willmore's (though he eventually reforms) is not only ugly but jaded, automatic, the result of a game he has obviously played too many times. He feels nothing for Florinda, not even real lust, and the attempted rape is not at all erotic, but an act of outraged desperation.

Akalaitis staged the rape scene deftly, with an especially appropriate performance by Jesse Sinclair Lenat as Willmore, an actor with a childish, petulant quality, whom I had seen earlier in the year at the Actors Theatre of Louisville playing a sixties hippy. That is exactly what Willmore is, a flower child before his time, doing his own thing, without regard to propriety or injury to others. Throughout the play, Akalaitis' staging of the action, despite the outlandish visual effects, was always brisk and clear; one could even argue that the exotic Carnival elements were an improvement on Behn, for whom the Carnival is a mere convention, an excuse for disguises. The play as written is English to the core, with no Latin sensibility whatsoever, but Akalaitis gave us English characters in a passionate Mediterranean world.

The Guthrie provided a splendid cast for *The Rover*, proving that classical acting is not dead in Minneapolis. Well spoken, all were completely audible, despite the continuing tinny acoustics, and performed with panache. I especially liked Stephen Pelinski as the viceroy's son, in a magnificent white costume, a tall, handsome, deep-voiced, elegant booby. His splendiferous sword fighting (choreographed by David Doersch) was the funniest thing in the play.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The second production I saw at the Guthrie was a disappointing version of David Storey's *Home*, a bittersweet, delicate, funny English play about five people in a mental institution. Storey is rarely done in the U.S.; his plays are so spare, so English, and so lyrical, that he is even harder for our actors than Pinter. Richard Ooms and Richard S. Iglewski had impeccable accents as Harry and Jack, two incredibly reserved, middle-class companions, but the bad acoustics defeated them; they tended to overplay, perhaps to compensate, yet still were sometimes inaudible. June Gibbons and Brenda Wehle lacked earthiness in the roles of working-class women, so that class distinction, so important in the play, seemed blurred. John Carroll Lynch was lifeless in the role of Alfred, the strong but simple young man whose sole activity in life seems to be weightlifting chairs; there is an important distinction between underplaying and outright non-acting. Garland Wright staged the play competently, creating (with designer Douglas Stein) interesting acting areas well out onto the stage's thrust, restoring some of the theatre's intimacy, but the production paled against the original with John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson in the early seventies in London, or the fine revival four years ago at the Stratford Festival in Ontario.[1]

The final production I saw at the Guthrie was Ferenc Molnár's *The Play's the Thing*. Molnár (1878–1952) was a Hungarian playwright of light comedies and dramas that were very popular in the United States from the twenties through the forties. The Theatre Guild produced several of his plays, including the musical version of *Liliom*, the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Carousel*. *The Play's the Thing* premiered in New York in 1926 in a translation by P. G. Wodehouse, ran for 326 performances, and then became a staple of college and community theatre groups for many years.

The play concerns a famous playwright, Sandor Turai, his collaborator Mansky, and their young protégé, Albert Adam. "How extraordinarily difficult it is to begin a play!" is the opening line, a typical Molnár joke. The three have arrived unannounced at a castle on the Riviera to pay a surprise visit to Albert's fiancée Ilona Szabo, a glamorous prima donna. They overhear a passionate scene between Ilona and her former lover, a famous actor, which of course devastates Albert. Turai then hits upon the idea of quickly writing a play that incorporates the dialogue they overheard. The next day, Szabo and the actor rehearse the concocted play. Albert watches, even volunteering to cue the performers, and becomes convinced that he had merely overheard another rehearsal the night before. Happy End.

As a lover of American theatre history, I was pleased to see the Guthrie revival of *The Play's the Thing*, which was well executed, but it became all too obvious that the play has dwindled to a mere period

[1] Reviewed here in Volume XLIII, No. 4 (Winter 1991).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

piece. One can well imagine what Pirandello might have made of the same plot device, which Molnár merely plays for laughs. In the play within the play, there is some very funny parody of the nineteenth-century well-made plays of Victorien Sardou, with all their skillfully manipulated intrigue, casually dropped exposition, schematic characterization, and sudden revelations and reversals (what Shaw called "Sardoodledom"), but Sardou and his methods are no longer familiar to modern audiences. The parody is still funny, but in a quaint rather than pungent way, and many good verbal jokes get lost, as when the actor says that the only Sardou he knows is *Hedda Gabler*! Molnár seems to have gradually slid into the dustbin of history; even in *Carousel* (recently revived in London and New York), where Richard Rodgers' music is as invigorating as ever, the book has come to seem awkward, naive, and sexist.

Michael Engler directed *The Play's the Thing* capably, placing all the action well forward on the thrust. Richard S. Iglewski, plump, lively, and avuncular, brought vitality to the role of playwright Turai, but Dan Illian was too bland and too old for Albert; "the boy" composer is supposed to be twenty-five, but Illian in his Van Dyke beard did not look a day under forty. Once again Stephen Pelinski, as the ham actor, stole the show; it is rare enough to find a beautiful actress with a sense of comedy, but almost unheard of to find it in a handsome leading man. Robert Brill's setting employed piles of theatrical junk at the back of the stage—trunks, wagons, stacked chairs and platforms, large flats with THE PLAY'S THE THING stenciled on them—which not only brought out the play's theatricalist metaphor, but also improved acoustics. I hate to keep harping on sound, but it is hard to get most directors these days to remember that audiences go to the theatre to hear plays as well as to see them!

The cliché of the Mexican bandit has been popular in American drama and fiction since the days when there were *bandidos* in real life. Nineteenth-century Californian outlaws like Joaquín Murieta, Anastacio Garcia, Juan Soto, and Tiburcio Vásquez were celebrated in their own time in newspaper accounts, melodramas, and pulp novels, as well as in public exhibits. Murieta's preserved decapitated head was actually put on display after he was captured and killed.

Luis Valdéz, the distinguished Chicano playwright best known for the biting, imaginative *Zoot Suit*, had his new play, *Bandido!*, performed in June at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. In it, Valdéz seeks to replace the melodramatic image of Chicano outlaws—treacherous, simple-minded, cruel, roguish—with one that he feels is closer to the way Chicanos saw them at the time, as resistance fighters. Unfortunately, the facts do not support either stereotype. Tiburcio Vásquez, the hero of *Bandido!*, came from a good Monterey family, was handsome and debonair, and may even have been something of a poet, but his career was that of a cheap crook. If he and his band saw

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

themselves as liberators (and there is little evidence that they did), their "revolution" consisted of cattle and horse stealing, highway robbery, and raids on stores and hotels. They appear never even to have robbed a bank, and certainly never organized an attack on any government force. The highest official they killed was a constable in Monterey, shot during a drunken argument at a dance. A major reason that the media could glorify outlaws like Vásquez is that they were never any serious threat to the established order.

Bandido! follows the historical record (as much as is known; there was much romantic embellishment at the time) fairly closely, condensing the story by conflating incidents, but adding little that is new, while making much of Vásquez's power over women. As a framing device, there is a melodrama taking place at the back of the stage, telling the story of Vásquez's career primarily through a series of songs and dances. Framing *that* is a set of conversations between Vásquez and the producer of the melodrama, Samuel P. Gillette; the impresario is willing to pay Vásquez, in jail and soon to be hanged, for memoirs of his career, which can then be quickly staged. The triple layers of action are confusing, as the play moves backwards and forwards in time, with embellishments based on Vásquez's memories and dreams. His fantasies consist mainly of theatrics, like the top-hatted impresario breaking into song and dance, a hearse turning into a display case, or the bandit's head being put on exhibit (an ignominy that the historical Vásquez, unlike Murieta, was spared). Surprisingly lacking are any visions drawn from Mexican folklore or the Catholic religion; instead, Vásquez seems to have spent a lot of time watching Ingmar Bergman movies.

The historical Vásquez defended himself at his trial by saying that he had not killed anyone himself, which was probably a lie. Valdéz presents this as the truth, even having his hero admonish his men not to kill. Nonetheless, Chávez, his loyal but unreliable lieutenant, loses his head during a robbery in a store in Tres Pinos and starts shooting, with the result that three people end up dead. In law, as indeed in common sense, it does not matter whether Vásquez actually pulled a trigger; if you tell your men not to kill, but then arm them to the teeth and take them around the countryside robbing and marauding, you are an accessory before, during, and after the fact, and deserve to be punished along with the actual murderers. Similarly, Valdéz's Vásquez defends himself against the charge of having left his pregnant girlfriend to die in the wilderness by saying it was a lie concocted to prevent her from being arrested for what she was, a willing gang member. But since the woman was the wife of one of his own followers, and only one among many of his sweethearts, he hardly comes across as a man of honor where women are concerned. In the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, philandering could be part of a hero's romantic image, but today it just makes him look like a male chauvinist hog.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In sum, *Bandido!* seems overly constrained by its historical subject. Looked at closely, Vásquez is not a very dramatic or otherwise exemplary figure. Valdéz, one of our more imaginative and theatrical of playwrights—his background was with the boisterous San Francisco Mime Troupe, after all!—has taken a rather plodding approach where he should have let his imagination cut loose. Aristotle in the *Poetics* maintained that although playwrights might be inspired by history, they should not follow it too closely, but should instead concern themselves with what might or should have happened. What if Vásquez really *had* started a revolution? What if he really was a fine poet, instead of just an occasional dabbler? What if he had had some genuine moral principles instead of just rationalizations for his behavior? And what if he really had something to say to Americans of today?

The production of *Bandido!* at the Taper, produced in cooperation with Valdéz's own El Teatro Campesino, had little to applaud. José Luis Valenzuela directed the actors frontally, as if for a proscenium stage, but the Taper, like the Guthrie, has a thrust. People like me sitting at the sides (a good third of the audience) therefore missed a good deal of the action because of actors covering one another. Miguel Delgado's tepid choreography suffered from the same problem, while Lalo Schifrin's music was forgettable even when it used traditional folk tunes. As for the acting, only the women in the cast—especially the beautiful Marabina Jaimes as Vásquez's dancer-sweetheart Rita—brought life to their roles. A. Martinez was a tame Vásquez; the part obviously calls for someone with the charisma of Edward Olmos, and may actually have been written for him, whose association with Valdéz goes back to *Zoot Suit*. Clive Revill seemed too British, too short, and too stiff as the impresario. But ultimately, the acting problems trace back to problems in the script, which needs to be comprehensively rethought and rewritten.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BERT CARDULLO

The Servant

MILAN KUNDERA ONCE MADE A HELPFUL DISTINCTION between two sorts of novels set in the past. There is, on the one hand, "the novel that is the illustration of a historical situation . . . popularizations that translate non-novelistic knowledge into the language of the novel," and on the other hand the novel that examines "the historical dimension of human existence."[1] In the first case, cardboard cutouts are wheeled out to represent "the bourgeoisie" or "the last throes of imperialism"—in other words, important social tendencies in the historical scheme of things rather than individualized or self-determined human beings. Here, the background effectively replaces the foreground. In the second case, history is only one part of a multifaceted portrayal of characters whose lives are inevitably and decisively, but not reductively, shaped by larger public events. In this sort of novel, that is, social institutions are presented in the form of complex human relationships; complex human relationships are not reduced to mere social symbols or signposts. Here, the background and the foreground bleed into each other at the same time that each retains its separate identity.

What Kundera says about the novel is transferable to its visual equivalent or rendition, the cinema, and all the more so in the case of a movie that has been adapted from fiction, like *The Remains of the Day*. This film, set in the past and dealing with issues of war, politics, class, and sexuality, has inspired diametrically opposed interpretations following Kundera's scheme. On the one hand, there are those who believe that *The Remains of the Day* states its political themes rather bumptiously, at the expense of character. On the other hand, there are those who consider James Ivory's latest film to be a poignant-pregnant portrait of the English class system up to World War II, of English hierarchies, rigidities, and blindnesses and their human perpetrators as well as victims; a portrait that has far more time to spend on the intimate portrayal of character from which metaphor can be inferred because it need only suggest the history of Hitler's rise and fall, with which its audience is intimately familiar. I propose to sort out these conflicting views, which are to some extent my own, in what follows.

I have not been a big fan of James Ivory's work in the past. It has suffered from a combination of Anglophilia, over-design, and under-emotion. Such films as *Howards End* (1992), *Heat and Dust* (1983), and

[1] Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. by Linda Asher (New York, 1988), p. 36.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Europeans (1979) are in the grand British-museum tradition of Alexander Korda, except that Korda's museum for the display of the aristocracy looks now like nothing more than its mausoleum. But that hasn't stopped Ivory, along with his regular producer, Ismail Merchant, and his usual screenwriter, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, from adding to the list of the dead and embalmed. These movies have nothing to do with contemporary British life; they don't use the past as a combined distancing-telescoping mechanism on the present; and they don't even have much to say about the past *as past*. *The Remains of the Day* marks a break from this tradition for Ivory and company, partly because of the very nature of its subject: the life of an emotionally and sexually repressed *butler* as it dovetails with that of his employer, a well-meaning but wrong-headed aristo-twit who, in the mid-1930s, secretly works to appease Hitler, avoid war, and preserve England's rigid social hierarchy.

The novel was written by Kazuo Ishiguro, who was born Japanese but bred English; it was supposed to have been adapted to the screen by Harold Pinter, but James Ivory discarded his script in favor of Jhabvala's. This is unfortunate because Pinter has proved himself adept at adapting novels with first-person narrators (e.g., *The Go-Between* [1970], *The Proust Screenplay* [1977], *The Heat of the Day* [1989]), something that is made difficult by the natural omniscience of the camera eye. The solution is obviously not to use a first-person camera throughout, to show only what the narrator can see and never the narrator himself, nor to employ large chunks of first-person voiceover narration; what the camera eye must do as much as possible is *see as the narrator in the book does*, see as if it were using the narrator's eyes. This is a neat trick, a kind of imaginative leap, and it can be made only by a screenwriter who is genuinely creative in her own right yet spiritually faithful to her source. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, alas, is not such a scenarist, though she isn't without a certain skill.

The story begins in 1958, shortly after Lord Darlington's death and the sale of his palatial manor, Darlington Hall, to a solitary, rich American. Stevens, the butler, is staying on to work for the new owner, Mr. Lewis, but with a staff reduced from twenty-eight at the climax of the British Empire to four during its present decline. Stevens is thinking of adding to that staff one Miss Kenton, the former (superbly efficient) housekeeper of Darlington Hall, who has recently sent him a letter (parts of which she reads in voiceover, and to which Stevens responds with his own letter read in voiceover) implying that she would like to return to her old position. So, having been given a week's vacation by his new employer, together with the use of the American's car, he sets out from Oxfordshire on a journey to the West Country to meet Miss Kenton. She's been Mrs. Benn for the past twenty years, during which time Stevens has not seen her, and by now has a grown daughter, but her marriage is in trouble. Miss Kenton seems to be searching for something, then, to be reaching out, and so does Stevens. As he rides through the countryside to his appointment with her, he flashes back to their relationship—or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nonrelationship—in the past, as well as to his role as master servant in a house once brimful of statesmen and ambassadors.

It was Stevens' role as servant, as server of Lord Darlington rather than fulfiller of himself, that got in the way of any personal relationship he might have had with Miss Kenton. A love seemed to evolve between these two household workers who never so much as call each other by their first names, but it remained unacknowledged and unexpressed—at least on Stevens' part. There is no real acknowledgement of its existence by Miss Kenton either, but there is some expression of feeling, which unexpectedly gets underscored in the film. Indeed, even Stevens' feeling gets expressed in the movie version, which recasts Ishiguro's exquisitely balanced tale more as doomed romance than as political allegory. This is a direction Pinter, with his latter-day political engagement, may have reversed, and a direction the normally reticent Ivory has apparently chosen to take in the condescending belief that the lower orders of society are more given to venting their emotions. For example, during one of their nightly meetings to discuss the management of the house, Miss Kenton responds to Stevens' question "Are you with me?" with the excuse that she is very tired. She *is* tired, of course—tired of meeting with him under these circumstances, solely to discuss work—but this meaning of "tired" remains subtextual in the novel. In the film, Miss Kenton directly expresses the sentiment that she wants to *be* with Stevens, not merely to talk with him about the discharge of their servants' duties.

The next day, her day off, she has a date in a pub with Tom Benn, a former butler who wants to marry her and open his own seaside boarding house at Clevedon. There is no such scene in the book; it fractures the first-person perspective of Stevens; and it's almost immediately followed by another insertion, Miss Kenton's desperate revelation to him of her impending engagement, to which he reacts by hastily leaving the room. Later, after she becomes formally engaged, Stevens impatiently offers her his "warmest congratulations," for "there are matters of global significance taking place upstairs and [he] must return to [his] post."[2] Then, in the process of fetching drinks for Lord Darlington's guests, he drops a fine bottle of port—one more "emotional" event that does not occur in Ishiguro's novel—peremptorily replaces it with another, and proceeds to deliver it. But he must pass Miss Kenton's room in order to do so, and here again the film tellingly diverges from its source. This is what the author understatedly writes:

> As I approached Miss Kenton's door, I saw from the light seeping around its edges that she was still within. And . . . that moment as I paused in the dimness of the corridor, the tray in my hands, an

[2] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (New York, 1989), p. 219.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> ever-growing conviction [mounted] within me that just a few yards away, on the other side of that door, Miss Kenton was at that moment crying. As I recall, there was no real evidence to account for this conviction—I had certainly not heard any sounds of crying—and yet I remember being quite certain that were I to knock and enter, I would discover her in tears.

In Ivory's film, as you might guess, the door does get opened and Stevens discovers Miss Kenton in tears, only to advise her that some household article wants dusting! Further, after the butler departs, the camera remains on Miss Kenton, regarding her heartbroken face in a way that Stevens could never bring himself to do.

The camera does this once more near the end of *The Remains of the Day*. Stevens and Miss Kenton have had their meeting and character-history has proved to be human destiny: the aging butler will return to his butlering without ever having brought up the subject of their dormant love, and the now matronly housekeeper will go back to her marriage and the promise of a grandchild from her expectant daughter. As he puts Miss Kenton on a bus in the novel, Stevens notices that she is crying and comforts her with some pleasantries—nothing more. As he puts her on that same bus in the film, Miss Kenton is not yet in tears. For heightened effect, we see her crying through the window of the departing bus as Stevens does; then, after he leaves the frame, we get another shot of her face receding in tears. From whose point of view? The omniscient camera-as-narrator, or Ivory-cum-Jhabvala as *nouveau* italicizers of emotion. This team even manages to inject heat into the novel's politics, or to put its heart where Ishiguro's head has prevailed. For instance, in the novel Lord Darlington, after "doing a great deal of thinking," tells Stevens to dismiss two Jewish housemaids, which he summarily does despite the strenuous objections of Miss Kenton. We never learn from Ishiguro what becomes of them, because in the book the girls are *English* Jews and therefore would not have been in danger of deportation. But in the movie the two maids are *German*-Jewish; Darlington decides they must be let go as he reads *Mein Kampf* (!); and, without work, the two young women are soon sent back to Germany, whence they are dispatched to concentration camps.

Ivory and Jhabvala readily seize on other opportunities to show the audience that their political heart is in the right place. Before departing for the West Country, Stevens is sent by them on business to the local general store, where he denies ever having known Lord Darlington, whom the clerk has decried as a Nazi sympathizer. No such scene occurs in the novel, and its effect is to change Stevens from an obtusely loyal, blindly trustful servant to a shifty timeserver masquerading as a man of conscience. En route to Clevedon, Stevens has a similar encounter—embellished by the filmmakers—with a doctor at an inn, where customers mistake the butler for a gentleman on account of his proper diction and dignified bearing. The high-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

born doctor senses Stevens' working-class origins and gets him to admit, in the film, that he is "in service" at a great house in Oxfordshire. Inevitably, their cinematic conversation comes around to Lord Darlington of Oxfordshire, whom the doctor pillories for his virtual collaboration with the Nazis, and with whom Stevens once again disavows any acquaintance. Then he relents and tells the truth: he was proud to have served Lord Darlington but his job was just that, *to serve*, not to agree or disagree with his employer's political views. He goes on to say that, in attempting to accommodate Hitler, Darlington made a mistake for which he later sincerely repented; whereas he, Stevens, once made a mistake too—but one that he can correct rather than lament. The teasing implication, of course, is that his mistake was a matter of the heart rather than politics: to have repressed his love for Miss Kenton, which he will shortly *ex*press to her in Clevedon.

Stevens' words here are a complete reversal of what he says in the novel, *two days after* Miss Kenton's departure by bus, to a man sitting next to him on a pier in Weymouth:

> Lord Darlington wasn't a bad man. He wasn't a bad man at all. And at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man. He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there, he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really—one has to ask oneself—what dignity is there in that?

Stevens appears less politically correct in this speech, since he calls Darlington courageous if misguided; but he also appears more emotionally honest because he speaks of his mistakes as irremediable in addition to undignifying, as inherent in his character as the narrative has established it. And they are *mistakes*, not one mistake, the use of the plural serving to conflate Stevens' relationship to Lord Darlington with his relationship to Miss Kenton. For the two relationships, and the butler's mistakes in them, are indeed related, as is Stevens' first-person perspective to the novel's thematic intent.

Ironically, Stevens gets to speak for himself in Ishiguro's tale, whereas in the past he had always allowed Lord Darlington to speak for him or at least to speak in his place. But in speaking for himself, he only reveals the tragicomic extent of his political capitulation and emotional barrenness, his substitution of a life of peripheral protocol for one of direct involvement. Being a butler, for Stevens, has been an act of selfless fealty toward a lord, not a mere profession or business—moreover, toward a lord engaged in great undertakings designed to secure England's future. He has allowed nothing to come between him and his duty to Darlington, not even the love of Miss Kenton, so satisfactory has his relationship with his master been. And Lord

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Darlington, for his part, has allowed nothing to come between him and his duty to his country, not even the love of a wife, so satisfactory has his life of (behind-the-scenes) public service been. As a member of the household staff at Darlington Hall, Miss Kenton serves Stevens even as he serves his lord and his lord serves the state. The problem with this hierarchy of faithful service, however, is that it permits no room for second-guessing, and second-guessing is what the actions of both master and butler so desperately require. When Miss Kenton tries to question the actions of her "betters"—particularly in the dismissal of the Jewish maids—she is rebuffed. No one questions the fact that the happy "partnership" of Stevens and Lord Darlington seems to rule out the need for female companionship, though I hasten to add that there is nothing overtly or even covertly sexual about their relationship.

Ishiguro means, I think, to make Stevens' blindness—both to Darlington's political naïveté and Miss Kenton's emotional warmth—stand as a metaphor for England's blindness to its own national character and destiny. Just as Stevens trusted in Lord Darlington, Darlington trusted in his, and his country's, ability to broker a lasting peace with the Germans where no one else had been able to. That is, he and his associates—who recall the members of the notorious if somewhat mythologized "Cliveden set"—placed their trust in the cachet of British empire and aristocracy, as did Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain after them. They were mistaken to do so because, as Hitler clearly saw, the empire and its royalty were headed for extinction. Stevens thought he was serving the empire by denying himself, but all that he really did was deny himself, deny the love that could have given his life some dimension. He unquestioningly accepted the class system and his insulated place in it, and his reward, like that of many of his countrymen high and low, was a life of lovelessness if not brutality, of coldness if not desolation, of constriction if not misery. Stevens' singular detachment or self-enclosure is well conveyed by the novel's first-person perspective, which naturally permits no other points of view to interject themselves and which furthermore allows Stevens to create his character, as well as its social significance, by indirection, without resort to psychologizing on the one hand or historicizing on the other. One of the problems with Ivory's film, as I've indicated, is that the omniscient camera *does* intervene and perhaps had no choice but to intervene. In doing so, however, it sacrifices Stevens' integral tunnel vision without providing any compensatory light.

The title of Ishiguro's novel refers both to the remains of Stevens' own day—to the quiet evenings following his daily yeoman's service as well as to the lonely retirement that awaits him—and to the twilight of British imperialism. That twilight tends to get moved back to its heyday or sunshine in Ivory's film, partly because of Tony Pierce-Roberts' cinematography, which appears celebratory instead of elegiac, lush rather than weathered; partly because of the movie's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ending, which instead of finding Stevens sitting alone on a seaside bench in the evening (as the novel does), shows him back at Darlington Hall the next morning going about his duties, which happen to include—oh, cliché of cinematic clichés!—releasing a trapped pigeon into the verdant beauty of the surrounding countryside; and partly because of the documentary-like sequences showing, even glorying in, how a great manor is run, from the butler's ironing of the morning paper page by page to the scullery maid's cleaning of the cutlery, from the elaborate preparation of meals to the equally elaborate accommodation of numerous important guests. The camera remains somewhat removed through all of this, yet one can't help thinking that the preoccupied Stevens would never take the time to scan the place and process of his work in such loving detail. Nor, as I've already pointed out, would he regard Miss Kenton in the way the camera does: lingeringly and lovingly. In the novel, she's a figure of imagination, created by words, a player in Stevens' internal drama whose face we never see. In the film, Miss Kenton takes on a life of her own—especially as acted by the estimable, I dare say enchanting, Emma Thompson. And that life with *its* drama detracts a bit from Stevens' own. Anthony Hopkins doesn't play the butler, he *inhabits* him as he knew he must if he were going to capture the inner life of a man who very nearly has no outer life, and whose appeal to any woman has to come from deep inside his self-imposed carapace. Hopkins creates a similar character in a film released almost at the same time as *The Remains of the Day*: Richard Attenborough's *Shadowlands*, the love story of C. S. Lewis and the American poet (as well as film critic) Joy Davidman. But there he is burdened by a script and direction far more sentimental than what Ivory and Jhabvala give him.

I obviously have my problems with their *Remains of the Day*, but I'll take it rather than no film version at all. And not least because of the generally fine supporting cast, among whose members two stand out: Hugh Grant, as Lord Darlington's presciently critical, refreshingly playful godson, and Peter Vaughan, as Stevens' aged underbutler of a father whose death inspires little filial emotion in his son. Even here, however, a mistake was made in (1) conflating the parts of the postwar American millionaire who buys Darlington Hall and an American congressman who attends a prewar Darlington conference to speak against the appeasement of the Nazis; and (2) casting the eager but wooden Christopher Reeve in the "collapsed" role. The man whose denunciation of Hitler at the Hall fell on deaf ears would most likely not revisit such a painful and frustrating memory in his retirement, nor would he then dimly declare—in Jhabvala's screenplay—that he couldn't recall what he said that evening in Oxfordshire more than twenty years ago. This puts his character on an intellectual level with Lord Darlington himself, and even Christopher Reeve is not *that* stupid. Neither, finally, is the film of which he is a part.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN LOUGHERY

The Great Dare

If you assumed that everything that needed to be said about French Impressionism had long since been uttered, documented, and turned into bite-size morsels of common knowledge, you are part of a large group. That sense of saturation is widespread. With the Frederic Bazille retrospective in Brooklyn and the Alfred Sisley in Baltimore last year, it seemed as if the chronicling of the whole circle of nineteenth-century artistic rebels (now calendar decorators), from the major to the minor names, was done and over with, for a generation at least. The surprise is that the "Origins of Impressionism" exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum this fall not only didn't have the character of a tired replay but made its subject almost as compelling and complex as it would have been in its own time. Its premise is just that notion which most art-history textbooks and courses frequently neglect: the idea that major changes in art (on the order of Impressionism, Cubism, or Abstract Expressionism) are fitful and incremental developments, not so much juicy, dramatic breaks in the time-line as subtle, entangling growths in a garden whose best features are only discernible from a distance. In the case of the metaphorical garden of painting, that distance is time.

The curators of "Origins of Impressionism" began their mammoth display of 175 paintings by situating the viewer in the all-important original context of the Salon of 1859. Or an approximation of that display that still allowed us to breathe: a crushing 4,000 paintings were on the walls of the original Salon is more like the horrifying truth. And an awful day's work that viewing must have been, to judge by the Geromes and the Flandrins and the Baudrys in the first gallery of the Metropolitan. But, no, the idea is that we are to scout for the clues of regeneration even in the thick of the life-denying, deadly dull underbrush of academic nudes and hokey historical anecdotes. So Daubigny and Corot begin to look all the more significant in this setting, at least for their authenticity, as does Fromentin for his energy and Courbet for his truculent, almost messy vigor. Change is in the making, in whatever embryonic stage, long before the famous 1874 Impressionist exhibition made it official, and "Origins" for a good while keeps us combing through the 1860s for the harbingers. Henri Fantin-LaTour's *Tannhauser* (1864) might look just a little silly today, but it is "the hot debauch of his palette," in Theophile Gautier's wonderful phrase, that gives it a place in the scheme of things, as a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

painting that dares to be ridiculous rather than approved and conventional. Even more emphatically, the Cézanne next to *Tannhauser*, a florid painting entitled *The Banquet*, must have seemed the height of lunacy or amateurishness in 1870. Actually, in 1994, it has a crazed, kitschy quality. "I wonder what he would have thought of seeing this painting here," one woman commented to a friend at a preview I attended. (I am an unrepentant eavesdropper in museums.) The friend acknowledged that it was hardly a "mint" Cézanne. But with *The Banquet*, as with Cézanne's almost sarcastic commenting on Manet in *Mary Magdalene* or in his brutish redoing of *Olympia* or *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, that would seem to be the idea: risk anything, let your restlessness guide you, in preference to any dutiful obedience to a shopworn "classical tradition." In that sense, the spirits of Courbet and Cézanne, those ultimate irascibles, are strongly felt throughout the early part of the exhibition, even though only a few of their works are included.

None of this is to imply, however, that the soon-to-be Impressionists ran about like proto-Dadaists or SoHo wannabes, indifferent to the great works that had preceded them or even to the idea of set genres. Perhaps the men of the 1860s and 1870s were the last generation to be so finely attuned to the balance that can exist between a living cultural tradition and innovative change. Because the order of the show, after the Salon room and a little mishmash of history/religious painting, was not chronologically or stylistically based but arranged by genre: the nude, the realist landscape, figures in the landscape, still life, portraits and figures, the Impressionist landscape, and modern life. The last two are not categories that would have existed in 1860, obviously, and something is lost in a tidy classification of them as equivalent to "the nude" or "still life," but so be it. What you got as you proceeded through the galleries at the Metropolitan, then, were some of the towering examples of each subject, little by little drifting away from what would have been accepted as suitable nudes or still lifes or portraits prior to the 1860s. You were also treated to more of the palette knife, meaning more gobby crusts of paint (as Zola put it, the palette knife was "the instrument of modernity"), as the brush became only one means to an end and the slick finish of the tightly done oil meant less and less. Still another enjoyable feature of the exhibition was the prominence it gave to someone like Frederic Bazille. He wasn't as good as his friends, though we will never know how he might have grown as he died at twenty-nine in the Franco-Prussian War, that stupidest of conflicts, but he meant a great deal to his colleagues like Renoir and was part of the whole package in its germinating "origins" period. (I have never liked the idea of large didactic exhibitions devoted only to "the best," anyway. If you understand Chekhov only through *The Cherry Orchard*, you don't understand Chekhov, and if you want to "know" opera, you'd better know your lesser Puccini as well as your Verdi hits.) Bazille's nudes and interiors

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

do their part in liberating the art form from the suffocating influence of Gerome and Bouguereau, and if Eva Gonzalez's *Soldier Boy* (1870) looks hopelessly meager next to Manet's *The Fifer* (1866), we are at least being offered a truer taste of the whole scene, byways as well as monuments, that followed from the attack on the Academy and the Salon.

In the last few galleries we saw what represents classic Impressionism in our time. Modern life, urban spectacle, real people, pastoral pleasures, all painted with a cleverly calculated sense of freedom. To a viewer in the 1990s, the early twentieth-century criticism of the Impressionists as "merely" artists with a good eye, too unthinking and purely retinal, has never seemed more jejune: the old "anxiety of influence" theory proved right for the umpteenth time. And the poster and calendar makers—including those the Met buys from—may do their best to merchandise the life out of these painters, but they refuse to go under. Two images were worth savoring as embodiments of the whole enterprise. Manet's 1868 portrait of Emile Zola from the Musée d'Orsay is a well-known picture, but one an American is apt to see in person only rarely. It still lives and functions as a reminder of the role that *mind*—intellect and courage—played in the birth of modern art. And Monet's *Le Quai du Louvre* (1867) from the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, a painting I had never seen before, is as complex and elaborately constructed a rendering of Paris as any one of the Impressionists ever tackled. The messy, clamorous, crowded here-and-now has never looked so worth knowing.

Summer is usually the worst time for art in New York, with the galleries closed and the museums often concentrating (appropriately) on their permanent collections for the sake of out-of-town visitors rather than on any temporary exhibitions of note. The summer of 1994 was quite the exception, though, between the survey of Oscar Kokoschka drawings at the Guggenheim, the unprecedented Stonewall exhibition at the New York Public Library, and the exhibition of early Salvador Dali paintings at the Metropolitan. Dali made a spectacle of himself in his last years, hopelessly confusing tackiness and mystique, and it is all too easy now to agree with those critics of the melting watches and the exploding eyeballs that his brand of Surrealism became at times a formula style, sometimes dry, sometimes flatulent. How agreeable, then, to spend some time in the presence of a young man who wasn't yet a caricature, who could manipulate paint like a prodigy (albeit an eccentric one), and who holds one's attention through technique rather than theme.

By far the finest moments of museum browsing during the summer, though, were connected to the Museum of Modern Art's display of selections of modern French art from the David and Peggy Rockefeller Collection. These twenty-one gems are the tip of the iceberg, presumably, and one wonders what American and other

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

European artists MoMA's most generous trustees have acquired, which the rest of us will one day be able to study. (Much of the Rockefeller collection will go to the museum eventually.) After paying homage to the eye and munificence of Albert C. Barnes and the Havemeyers last year, the museum world and art press now rightly direct some attention to the Rockefellers. From Manet's *The Brioche* (1870), an elegant nod in the direction of Chardin, to Derain's *Charing Cross Bridge* (1905), a Fauve spectacle of rising clouds and setting sun over the Thames, the show covered a significant, savvy range of taste.

Three paintings in particular kept drawing me back week after week to this exhibition, the first of which raises a friendly question about MoMA's permanent collection. Monet's *The Gare St.-Lazare: Sunlight Effect* (1877) was appealing for its typical Monet obliqueness—the subject partially lost in the blasts of steam, the shadows, the arresting light—and for a kind of yellow we don't normally see a lot of in Monet, the kind that makes us want to stand in the sunlight some days and just forget where we are going. Now, of course I don't know if this superb painting is one that has been earmarked for MoMA, but one certainly, almost desperately, hopes so. The best Impressionist works may long since have found homes elsewhere, but the beginning of the story of modern art on West 53rd Street with the Post-Impressionists has always seemed a misfortune when what is needed is at least one small pre-Cézanne gallery with even a few choice French works from the 1870s. The Rockefellers' Manet, Pissarro, and Monet could effect that transformation very quickly. *Opus 217. Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones, and Tints, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890* surely will end its days on the walls at MoMA (with a huge wall plaque obviously). Paul Signac's almost campy rendering of the critic Félix Fénéon against a manic Pointillist pinwheel of color makes a nice case for the tongue-in-cheek, more than the solemn, aspect of Modernism. Picasso's *Girl with a Basket of Flowers* (1905) ended the exhibition and was something like the ultimate example of a painting that carries its own weight and yet hints at a talent held in reserve so powerful, so unexpected in what it is going to unleash later, that it makes the viewer, happily, uncomfortable. In fact, this painting *is* willed discomfort as an aesthetic experience, from the troubling realistically rendered face of the nude young girl to the strangely elongated formality of the rest of her body to the basket awkwardly nestled against her middle to the slate blue—a sort of storm-sky blue—of the background. It is a perverse pleasure Picasso provides (not to mention the seedy erotic implications, so like Balthus), but only a hint of what is to come.

If what could be seen in New York's museums provided reason enough to linger in the city during August, the weather did not. A trip that month to the cooler, less humid terrain of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina—however implausible that sounds—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

also brought me to ten museums, between Richmond and Charleston, which I had never been to before. The magnificence of the new Sydney and Frances Lewis wing for contemporary art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, the breadth of the permanent collection at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh (a strange concrete bunker of a building, I must say), the variety of the Reynolda House collection of American art in Winston-Salem, the odd finds in places like Charlotte or Greenville, South Carolina: for the smug Northeasterner who thinks of seeing good painting as a matter of keeping in circulation between Boston and Washington, the experience of breaking out of the loop is always exciting.

"Pictorial Effect/Naturalistic Vision: The Photographs and Theories of Henry Peach Robinson and Peter Henry Emerson" at the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk was one particularly interesting, well-installed exhibition I would have missed but for my wanderings in the South. Its focus was the photographs of two nineteenth-century British landscape and genre photographers who were important, adversarial figures in their day but are fairly obscure names a century later. What made this show noteworthy, though, was its thesis that in their antithetical approaches to their art form Robinson and Emerson foreshadowed the artistic debates of a later age and suggested that in aesthetic matters there isn't any such entity as a "final judgment." For Robinson, the principal theorist of art photography in the 1880s, was the master of the highly doctored photograph, making use of every manner of staged outdoor setting, odd lighting effect, and technical contrivance in the interest of the effects he wanted. As a result, his country folk lolling in the pastures can be a nutty bunch. Emerson, the preeminent naturalist, was the prophet of what would later be referred to as "straight photography" who rebelled, vehemently and sarcastically, against the artifice of his older colleague. The triumph in the twentieth century of Emerson's more purist view is a long-established fact—the grand line extends from Alfred Stieglitz to Edward Weston to Ansel Adams and on into the 1990s—as Robinson gradually took on the aura of just another Victorian oddball. But as an intriguing catalogue essay for the Norfolk Museum show has it, we might take another look at Robinson's highly studied, even affected images and see in them the same impulse that animates the art of Sherrie Levine, Joel-Peter Witkin, Duane Michals, Cindy Sherman and countless others who today work with photography as something much more than a visually transcribing medium, poetic or otherwise (not to mention the infamous Starn Twins, who are given to ripping, wrinkling, and retaping their eerie, very affected, "un-straight" photographs). And, in truth, with that sense of contemporary experimentation in mind, the photographs of Robinson do take on a different meaning which they would not have had without the special context of a buried legacy and the need of succeeding generations to break the old rules. Robinson's progeny also question the nature of their art

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

form by paying less fealty to the lens and the film itself. Imagination, rather than nature, becomes the final authority.

A smaller scale but similarly useful show was the display of the works of Will Henry Stevens at the Gibbes Museum in Charleston, all of which were borrowed from the Morris Museum in Augusta, Georgia. Stevens was an early twentieth-century American painter and watercolorist. He was also that oddest of birds, a true Southern Modernist. In a region preoccupied with the past (that Confederate flag over the state capitol in Columbia looked pretty tawdry to this Yankee) and never very hospitable to European/New York avant-garde cultural ideals, Stevens made a home for himself in two worlds, as a landscape artist who revered the mountains and rivers of the several Southern states he lived in and as a loner who intuitively understood the limitations of the academic tradition between the wars. *The LaFitte Coast* or *Houseboat on the Bayou*, for example, are skillfully made pictures yet they aren't radically different from or less sentimental than the dozens of other realist nature scenes one can see on the walls of any small-town museum. But inspired by the Kandinskys and Klees he saw on his trips to New York and following his own quiet, questing nature, Stevens ultimately found his way toward an art that went beyond surface exactitude—and naturally found no audience to speak of in his time. *The Warmth of Southern Light* is about hot sun on moving water but works its magic by means of flat, schematic, glowing bands of evocative shapes, very like a Klee, while the Cubist *Boy on a Boat* is langorously fragmented and *Gulf Abstraction* is, as its title implies, a meditation rather than a snapshot. Will Henry Stevens appears as a footnote in some of the longer histories of American art and opportunities to see his work have always been rare. Here is yet another example of why we need to rely on regional museums and excursions out of the big cities to get the full story of the development of modern art. In the Paris of the 1860s or in a country house in the Carolinas seventy years later, the issues are the same: how far does an artist push himself, how deep is he willing to probe? And, most importantly, how willing is he to ignore what his audience wants and gamble that he knows best?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CARL PFLUGER

The Views and Visions of Thomas Cole

When Thomas Cole died in 1848, his reputation, both in the art world and among the general public, was enormous: probably higher than has been attained by any other American painter, before or since. Generally recognized as the founder of the "Hudson River School," the first distinctively American movement in the visual arts, he had (largely by his own untutored efforts) virtually invented a new style of landscape, specializing in views of the wilderness which in those days could still be seen (though already requiring some effort to get around the touristy trappings) in the Northeastern states: especially in the valleys of the Hudson and Connecticut rivers, and in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. At the same time, Cole (who was always working restlessly at improving his technique and diversifying his subjects) had also produced a large body of work more obviously derived from older European models: "Arcadian" pastorals in the tradition of Claude Lorrain; melodramatic renditions of Biblical and other literary themes, which owed a lot to John Martin; elegiac views of Antique ruins, mostly in Italy; and a handful of unclassifiable paintings which (at least to this eye) look like uncanny anticipations of Surrealism. Yet more significant than all these, in the estimation of both Cole himself and most of his contemporaries, were those works generally described, for want of a better word, as allegories—which Cole sometimes called "epico-historical," and which he always regarded as "the higher style of landscape." These were groups of pictures conceived and executed as consecutive series, illustrating in a clearly sequential narrative mode some moral, philosophical, religious or historical lesson. Pre-eminent among these sequences are *The Course of Empire*, *The Voyage of Life*, and *The Cross and the World*. These widely admired works were, Cole felt, his highest achievements, the strongest supports of his standing as an artist and a visionary.

But hardly less phenomenal than the scale of Cole's reputation during his life was its steep and sudden decline shortly after his death. (I can't help feeling that Cole himself would have derived some melancholy enjoyment from this, preoccupied as he so often was with spectacles of the transience of human accomplishment.) By the turn

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the century his work was taken seriously in only one of its many facets—the "pure" landscapes, especially of "wild" scenes—and even these were often treated with a patronizing benevolence not far short of contempt. As for the paintings dearest to Cole's heart—the religious allegories, the historical epics—they were dismissed or ignored as an embarrassment, or worse, as a kind of contamination spawned by what James Thomas Flexner called (in 1962) Cole's "dangerous literary gifts." More recently, artistic fashions have been changing again—is this one of the more beneficent effects of post-modernism?—making possible some small steps toward rehabilitation. The most recent such step (and probably the biggest so far) is "Thomas Cole: Landscape into History," a major exhibition organized at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. by William H. Truettner and Alan Wallach, displaying about 70 of Cole's paintings and accompanied by an illustrated catalogue (more useful and informative than such publications often are) including essays by J. Gray Sweeney, Christine Stansell and Sean Wilentz, as well as by Wallach and Truettner themselves.[1] This exhibit is especially welcome because it makes a serious effort to get beyond that conventional wisdom of the past century or so, and to consider all facets of Cole's work within a more integrated and comprehensive view—closer at least to the painter's own intentions. Wallach, Truettner and their colleagues have also done much to place Cole in his social, political and cultural context in early nineteenth-century America. Their particular interpretations here must still be regarded as limited and tentative—no single formula could encapsulate so protean an artist as Thomas Cole—but there is no question, I think, that they are on the right track in trying to reintegrate "the two Thomas Coles" (as Professor Truettner titles his essay) and in taking Cole seriously as that rarity of the modern world, an artist who actually *thinks*: about nature and history, life and literature; about humankind and its place in the world.

And as for how all that thinking inflected Cole's work as a painter—well of course, some of his works are technically better than others; and some are more derivative than others; and yes (the conventional wisdom was right to this extent) he developed his most original insights by working closely with some of the particular features of American scenery—features which were then still largely new to European eyes. But then going beyond this, he applied that insight to something both wider and deeper, developing (to invoke a pair of Cole's own favorite terms) a historical "vision" as well as a painterly "view." And that, one might say, is what landscape, in its most authentic sense, is always trying to be about. For although landscape

[1] "Thomas Cole: Landscape into History" originated at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., travelled to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, and is now on view at the Brooklyn Museum (January 13–April 2, 1995).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

may sometimes seem to be a naive genre of painting, in reality it is not. Historically, both in China and in Europe (the only two cultures so far to have developed landscape at all fully) it arose very late in the artistic tradition. Only after many centuries of representing more or less distinct individual figures did people begin paying serious attention to the background in which those figures were placed, to the connecting spaces between them: in short, to their total environment. And it seems probable that such developments always depend on, but in turn contribute back to, parallel developments in such other fields as science, philosophy, religion, history and literature. In China, where painters were at least officially expected to be literati, a relation between landscape painting and both religious and philosophical Taoism, for example, has long been taken for granted. In the West (where of course our whole landscape tradition is much younger) such connections have been more problematic; but it is helpful to keep them in mind when trying to understand Thomas Cole, who was so passionately (and sometimes profoundly) religious, literary, and historically-minded a painter—even in the most superficially "naive" of his wilderness scenes.

No, there were not "two Thomas Coles"; but there is an unresolved duality within Cole himself, and within his work: a division too glaring to be ignored. Toward the end of his essay in the catalogue Professor Wallach approaches this division, rather diffidently, when he writes:

> . . . if a fault line runs through Cole's art, it lies between the historical and the ahistorical, between the landscapes and allegories that in a more or less fragmentary way evoke the stages of history and "mutation of earthly things" and the religious allegories and related paintings. Yet even this division is in a sense unnecessary since, as we have seen, the historical and the ahistorical were themselves closely connected.

I would put it rather differently. Virtually all of Cole's work *is* historical; and it is also virtually all religious. The problem is that Cole actually believed in (or at least tried to believe in) two different religions at the same time. Christianity (to which, given his own historical origins, Cole could scarcely have escaped making at least a nominal commitment) coexisted in him with a personal, deeply felt, and fully religious reverence for Nature. This particular religious attitude has actually been around, in one form or another, a good while longer than Christianity itself; but it was re-emerging with special force and intensity in Cole's own Romantic period, and was the real source of his strength and originality as a landscapist.

I'm not sure how conscious Cole was of the tension between his two religious loyalties—my suspicion is that he could not admit it to himself, and kept trying, out of a dogged sense of duty, to impose his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

familiar but somewhat shopworn Christianity onto his more impassioned but less fully articulated Naturalism—but its effects show, often quite painfully, in his more didactically Christian pictures. Few things in the history of art can be more literally excruciating than those crosses glowing like neon signs in the desert—a "prophecy" come literally true in our time, which Cole, had he lived to see it, would certainly have abhorred!—or those insipidly phosphorescent figures of Christ and of angels (anemic, attenuated derivatives of Raphael and his successors, the bane of so much post-Renaissance Christian art . . .) which seem to have dropped down like aliens out of a UFO (often accompanied by unnatural laser-like light effects) into an otherwise passably naturalistic landscape, in such paintings as *The Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of his Journey* or the *Angels Ministering to Christ in the Wilderness*. Of course one could always argue that such gauche intrusiveness is a respectable artistic convention, meant to suggest the absolutely transcendent and supernal power of the Divine; but such an argument would have already conceded the most important point: that at least in its symbolic language, Cole's Christianity is always referring ultimately to some source of value which does not coexist comfortably or harmoniously with anything we can readily recognize as "nature," that is, with the world as we know it on Earth. It could also be argued that much of the awkwardness in these Christian paintings results from a much simpler and more technical cause: Cole's notorious weakness in handling the human figure. It is true that his figures are often inept; but not uniformly so. Generally they are at their worst when Cole seems not to have a clear sense of how his humans fit naturally into their surroundings, when he just sticks them in for more or less obviously arbitrary and symbolic purposes. He sometimes did this even in his "pure" wilderness scenes. (Truettner and Wallach give one especially egregious instance of this: when Cole painted *The Falls of the Kaaterskill* in 1826 it was already a busy tourist attraction, with the usual clutter of hotels, walkways and protected bridges overlooking the Falls. Cole omitted all that from his painting; instead, he placed a solitary Native American in the scene. This poor Indian is stuck there, quite awkwardly and unesthetically, leaning against his bow on a bare ledge in the middle of the painting. Clearly, he serves here only as a self-conscious sign or label, as if one had written a caption: "THIS PICTURE REPRESENTS AMERICA BEFORE THE WHITE MAN.") But cases like that are extreme, and rare. Cole's level of technical accomplishment varied considerably from time to time, but he could and did paint human figures credibly enough when he had reason to: when this was clearly demanded by his conception, and supported by what we would call the "human ecology" of his design.

In his Arcadian pastorals, for instance, human beings (and their artifacts) tend to fit happily enough into their natural settings. These

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pictures probably represent Cole's most Utopian vision, the clearest personal declaration of his idea of the Good Life, the True and the Beautiful. For although Cole fully deserves to be recognized as one of the nineteenth-century godfathers of the modern environmental movement, although he genuinely loved his wilderness scenes and certainly contributed largely to that positive revaluation of the very idea of "the wilderness" which (in its sharp contrast to Biblical attitudes of dread and hostility) has been one of the great revolutions in values accomplished over the past couple of centuries—still, Cole would not have qualified as an "environmental extremist" even by the most polemical of definitions current today. He did not assume an irreconcilable antipathy between "Man" and "Nature"; he had none of the misanthropy that sometimes infects the wilder fringes of Deep Ecology. Wallach and Truettner characterize his general attitude as "pessimist conservatism," which is fair enough as far as it goes; but it really doesn't take us very far toward understanding the deepest ranges of Cole's yearnings, his aspirations or his fears. He did fulminate, in writings such as *American Scenery*, against the "ravages of the axe" in his beloved woods; but his "conservatism" always allowed for a fitting measure of progress, and held out the hope for a harmonious coexistence of the human and the natural: a vision, finally, of Man as an essential (but not tyrannically domineering) part of Nature, hopefully respectful of, and always subject to, the limits of the natural world. This is the vision realized most idyllically in those Arcadian or pastoral scenes, where the boundaries between the natural and the human worlds are shown clearly enough, but generally in soft and mutually yielding contours, not in the harsh lines of a radical confrontation. (Such softness of outline, we should notice, is both a real physical feature of the geologically ancient mountains of Eastern North America, and an instantly recognizable visual signature in most of Cole's paintings; just as those almost incredibly vertical—but equally real—Chinese mountains portrayed by the painters of the Northern Sung School are an equally characteristic "signature" of their work.) In these pictures, Cole's painterly vocabulary begins to express something of the idea of "bioregionalism"—a term perhaps more familiar to ecologists than to art critics, but one which seems singularly appropriate to the vision of Thomas Cole. These landscapes have been "humanized," it's true, compared to the "wild scenes"; but the humans in them (and their works, especially in the pictures of ruins) have themselves become more integrally a part of the natural scene. And in *The Course of Empire*—which after all is teeming with human figures—the "fit" is accomplished even more effectively: because it is the overarching theme of the whole series.

In this grandest and most completely realized of his "epico-historical" works (which Wallach and Truettner quite properly offer as the centerpiece of their exhibition), Cole presented his synoptic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and secular vision of the situation of Man-in-Nature, bringing together nearly all his familiar themes and deploying all his painterly styles and vocabularies. In five successive scenes he shows us a civilization progressing from the condition of primitive hunters in the wilderness, through an agrarian/pastoral "Arcadia" to the megalopolitan pomp of the *Consummation of Empire*—a neo-Classical nightmare suggesting Washington, DC, as it might have been redesigned by Albert Speer—which is then destroyed by war in the fourth scene, subsiding into a remarkably tranquil and idyllic set of ruins in the fifth, the only picture of the set from which living human beings are entirely absent. ("Desolation" is the title of this piece, but somehow one does not feel that Cole really felt all that desolate while painting it: this view of the natural world quietly reclaiming its territory from the fallen city is the most hauntingly beautiful picture of the series.) Constant through all these scenes are two features of the natural setting: a precipitous mountain, always visible in the distance, and the long narrow bay around which the city eventually grows. "Mountains and water"—clear symbols of an elemental duality; and according to Chinese ideas (which Cole may never have heard of, but which he so often seems to have paralleled in his own way) the defining terms of landscape itself. . . .

It is pretty clear that Cole regarded the urban proliferation of the *Consummation* as a pathological excrescence on the face of the Earth. The really interesting question is, at what level—social, political, cultural, religious or technical—did he believe this pathology to be rooted? Wallach and Truettner stress the political dimension: a warning, rooted in Classical Republican theory, against the "excesses of democracy," mob rule and Caesarism in Andrew Jackson's America. In a way, this reiterates (though of course with much more scholarly depth) the reviewers of Cole's own time, who tended to focus on the question, "What does this work say about the prospects for our Republic?" (Cole was, among other things, a nationalist artist, and himself a formidable symbol of national pride, at least to the more culturally minded of his compatriots. This accounts, after all, for a large part of the fame he enjoyed in his lifetime.) But while I'm convinced that Cole did devote some of his attention to such political concerns, that is really only the most parochial side of this truly ecumenical artist. Ultimately, *The Course of Empire* is a religious work, although not a Christian one. Christianity is an explicitly human-centered religion, and in some ways even an egocentric one, fixated on the fate of the individual soul. But if *The Course of Empire* preaches anything, it preaches something more like the ancient Greek admonitions against *hubris*, the baneful excess of human ambition, against which our only protection is a scrupulous observance of the intrinsic limits of all things. To mention only one poignant sign of this lesson, Cole plays a fascinating game with his own signature in *The Course of*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Empire. He works it into each of the first four scenes as an inscription on one or another of the stones, growing larger and more elaborately self-assertive in each successive view; until at last, in the *Destruction*, it flares out in grotesque and agitated lettering on the base of the colossal headless statue which dominates that composition—and then, among the ruins of the *Desolation*, it is nowhere to be found. I read this as one of Cole's more transparent allegories: against the rampant egotism which can infect all of us, even Christians and artists. Such moralizing was often enough typical of Cole, and not always accomplished with the same finesse; but at its strongest his vision went much deeper than his Whiggish politics, and deeper than his Evangelical Christianity: to an apprehension of humanity as a species fully embedded in its natural matrix, which we *may* violate in our arrogance and egotism, but only at the risk of our own extinction.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT S. CLARK

Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood

BRAND-NEW CONCERT HALLS ARE RARE in America today. Confidence that audiences will continue to expand or even remain stable is on the wane. Traditional sources of building funds, from philanthropy to patronage, are dwindling. And reconstruction—of movie theaters, breweries and the like—is supplanting fresh construction in our recycling-conscious time.

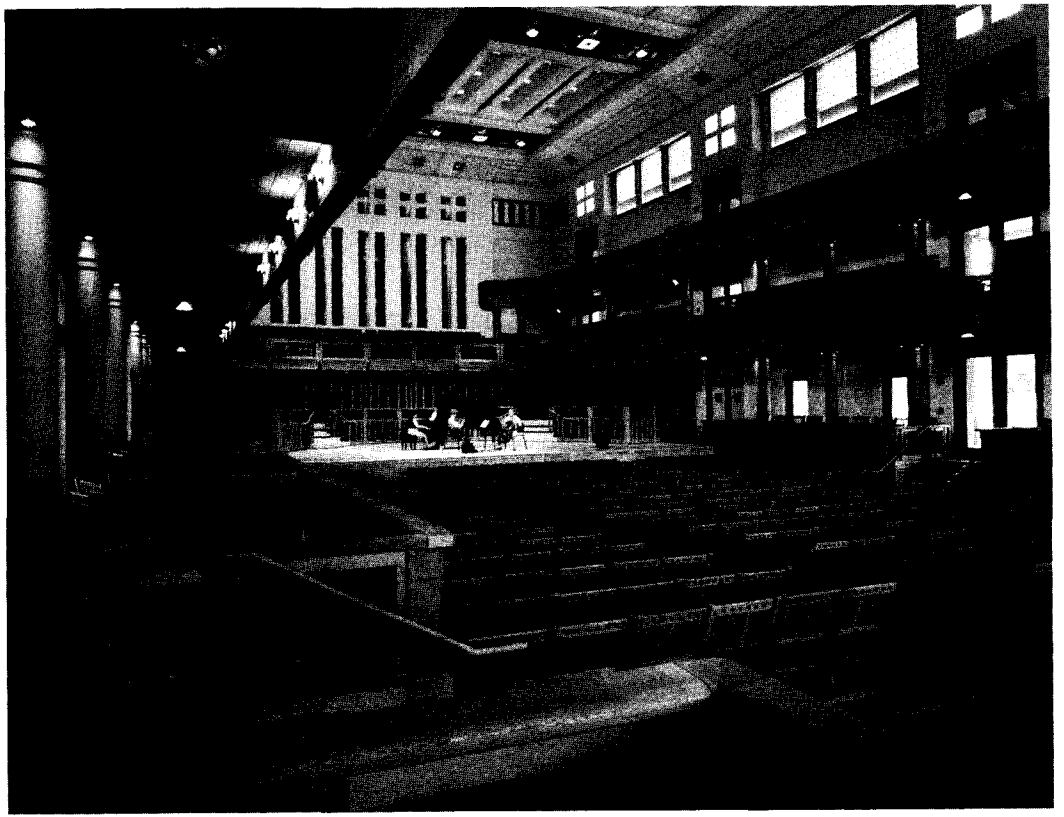
But in the mid-eighties, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, one of the few American musical institutions bankable enough to have a secure future, drew up a plan for the decades to come. High on the wish list was the replacement of the woefully inadequate Theater/Concert Hall at Tanglewood, its summer home in western Massachusetts. The resulting structure, Seiji Ozawa Hall, opened in July 1994.

The closest William Rawn, the architect of Ozawa Hall, had come previously to designing a concert hall was an outdoor performance pavilion in Lowell, Mass. But clearly Rawn, whose work has ranged from row houses for the Charlestown Navy Yard Project in Boston to urban renewal design for downtown Rochester, New York, attaches great importance to matching buildings to the spirit of the place they occupy. In an interview Rawn speculated that his selection for the Tanglewood job by the orchestra's trustees may have owed something to the fact that at the initial meeting his team spoke "at length about our response to the Tanglewood setting—its landscape, its spirit, its ambience—about *how* you would build at Tanglewood."

It was after the Boston Symphony purchased the Highwood Estate adjacent to the Tanglewood grounds in 1986, more than doubling its real estate in Stockbridge, Mass., that the trustees moved to replace the Theater/Concert Hall, the location for Tanglewood Music Center student performances, the annual week-long contemporary music festival, and solo and chamber recitals. With its hard-edged acoustics, packed-earth flooring, back-wrenching seating, and uncontrollable penetrability by its natural surroundings—sharp winds could blow scores off music stands, and bats and mice were frequent intruders during performances—the Theater/Concert Hall just as often tested its occupants' endurance as it supplied them pleasures.

Seiji Ozawa Hall was conceived as the Theater/Concert Hall's successor. Named for the orchestra's current music director, who has held the post for two decades, the Hall is located on the Highwood grounds, now dubbed the Leonard Bernstein Campus of the Tangle-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Seiji Ozawa Hall,
Tanglewood

Photo credit: Steve Rosenthal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wood Music Center, to the west of the Koussevitzky Music Shed, where full-scale orchestral concerts are played. It is a handsome structure, with red brick exterior walls, flanked by Alaskan yellow cedar two-story loggias that run the length of the sides and open directly into the first-floor boxes and the second-story balconies. The barrel roof is made of lead-coated copper. At the main building's southwest corner it is linked to the Bernstein Performers' Pavilion, which houses the conductor's suite, dressing rooms, storage for instruments, practice rooms, and recording facilities—all surrounding an interior courtyard planned as a meeting place for the Music Center's students.

Rawn and his colleagues chose the site carefully. They saw that the older environs were dominated by the former Tappan residence, now administrative offices, which sits atop a hill with a commanding view of the Stockbridge Bowl. From it, too, there are clear sight lines across the lawn to the Shed. Rawn wanted the same relationship between the new Hall and the Highwood Manor House, used for offices and private dining facilities for the orchestra's patrons, which also overlooks the lake. He did not want the new Hall to "overwhelm" the new campus.

But the overriding imperative was the concept of "the famous Tanglewood lawn." The new Hall had to offer good aural and visual access to as many as 2000 concertgoers on the lawn stretching up and out beyond a large sliding "barn door" at the rear. "One way to do that," Rawn is quoted as saying,

> is to site the Hall like an amphitheater. Several of the outdoor venues in the U.S. are built like that, at the bottom of steep slopes. But that's not the Tanglewood tradition. Tanglewood is about spreading your blanket, laying out the picnic, arranging your wine glasses in front of you. It was important to preserve that gentle slope in our siting–steep enough that you can see over the heads of the people in front of you, but flat enough that your wine bottle doesn't fall over. That's why we strongly advocated putting the Hall higher up the hill.

Now, with the thinning of the growth of trees that formerly divided Tanglewood from Highwood, the lawn extends in a sweeping arc from behind the Shed westward past the Highwood mansion and subsequently to the rear of the new Hall, drawing the campuses and their principal buildings together.

The Hall seats 1180, about the same as the Theater/Concert Hall. Its interior departs from the traditional only slightly: it has no proscenium, and some seats are located behind and above the stage at the level of the first balcony. Rawn and his acoustical consultants, R. Lawrence Kirkegaard and Associates of Downer's Grove, Illinois, spent months examining the concert halls and outdoor music venues

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Europe and America. For Ozawa Hall they chose the classic shoebox shape—not surprisingly, since it characterizes many of the structures commonly conceded to possess the best sound: Vienna's Musikverein, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and Boston's own Symphony Hall.

Inside, the stage is at the Hall's southwest end, and is reached from the Bernstein Pavilion. The principal material of interior construction is teak, visually both warm and informal—no red plush here. The seats, slat-backed chairs of simple design, are more comfortable than they look at first. The orchestra seating slopes gently and then more sharply up to the rear of the hall and the sliding door. Flanking the orchestra on the main floor are boxes, above which on each side rise two shallow balconies supported by rectangular columns. There are two more steeply raked balconies, one at the rear where it might be expected, and the other overlooking the stage. Above these are a series of tall windows that bring abundant light inside.

Visually the interior design is governed by patterns of rectangles and squares, particularly evident in the grillwork that supports the railings of the balconies and boxes. To the eye, the angles and lines look true. But in fact, at Lawrence Kirkegaard's insistence, subtle irregularities were introduced in various ways, to prevent acoustical standing waves that can produce echoes and other sonic anomalies, and to diffuse the sound generally. For example, a curve was routed into the front surface of the wood grillwork. Elsewhere, Rawn canted other interior elements, and made the ceiling coffered ("like upside-down bathtubs") but not with perfect curves.

And what are the results? The acoustics are excellent. This observer attended three concerts in the Hall, hearing many kinds of mixed instrumental ensembles, in one instance including the human voice, from several locations, and with the rear door both open and shut. From all points the sound is solid, rich, and undistorted. Blend is superior and balances are good on the whole. On the debit side I noticed only a tendency for the treble to weaken against the bass and midrange as it rose in pitch; in a string quartet performance, some first violin lines seemed to recede when they should have been dominant, and high string harmonics were inaudible. But this amounts to a quibble when set against the greatly satisfying impression overall.

The Hall is equipped with a set of door-like panels that can be lowered from slots in the ceiling to diffuse the sound further, and they were in use at one performance I heard, but it was impossible to judge their effect. A question about acoustics elicited from the orchestra's press office the response that further "fine tuning" would be done, but no specifics were offered. In any case, the problems are slight, at least from the perspective of the audience. Of the harsh sonic glare, grating edge, and anemic bass that afflict too many New York auditoriums, there are blessedly no traces.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is tempting to see Ozawa Hall as more than just another place to hear music, as something quintessentially American. Rawn's design, probably consciously, partakes of the Shaker spirit of spare elegance that is a vital part of the heritage of western Massachusetts. The design's essence is at once patrician and egalitarian, embracing the contradiction by welcoming not society's elite but nature's. It is utilitarian but spiritual too, in a way that perhaps only an American building can be. It is a credit to all who participated in its conception and realization, and should be a magnet for everyone who loves the Western musical tradition for a long time to come.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARK JARMAN

Shifting Sands: *The Columbia History of American Poetry*

IN THE MID-1600S, AS THE MASSACHUSETTS COLONIST Anne Bradstreet was writing the poems that would be published in London in 1650 as *The Tenth Muse Lately sprung up in America*, the oral tradition of Native American poetry was uniting use and beauty inextricably, though in ways unknown and even ignored until Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, two hundred years later, tried to capture them in *Hiawatha*. And in the early 1700s, the nonconformist minister and colonist Edward Taylor wrote the last of his "Preparatory Meditations" some twenty years before Lucy Terry, a slave, also in Massachusetts, wrote "Bars Flight" about an Indian massacre, the first formal poem known to be written by an African American. As this useful new reference book[1] makes clear, all sorts of Americans have been composing poetry, from the first American colonies, and before, until the present day. Some have enjoyed celebrity in their day, others have not and have waited to be retrieved at different times. Bradstreet was known as a poet during her lifetime, but Taylor had to wait to be rediscovered in the 1930s by that invaluable editor Thomas H. Johnson, who also labored long and fruitfully to give us the poetry of Emily Dickinson. As for poetry by African Americans, its history is lengthy, but made up of even more piecemeal retrievals, until the nineteenth century and the Harlem Renaissance, and even today major figures like Gwendolyn Brooks and Robert Hayden are subsumed by categories of African American literature where they do not exactly fit. Native American poetry, on the other hand, has only recently developed a tradition of written texts. Otherwise Native American poets have had to look, like most other American poets, to Anglo-American and European traditions, a vexing issue for its practitioners.

What is happening to canon formation elsewhere in American literature is at work in American poetry, and this book is a reflection. It's the sand dune effect. Prominent features of the landscape are being effaced by the sands of reaction, reformation, and forgetfulness, as others are revealed. William Pritchard writing about Eliot assumes "there does not exist a younger nonacademic reading public

[1] THE COLUMBIA HISTORY OF AMERICAN POETRY, ed. by *Jay Parini*. Columbia University Press. $59.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for Eliot's writings." The poet who for Pritchard is "the major poet-critic of the century" lives on only where such designations matter—in the academy. Whereas Ann Charters writing about "Beat Poetry and the San Francisco Renaissance" states confidently that Ginsberg and his associates are "some of the most widely read American poets of the last half-century." The difference between Pritchard's approach and Charters' is that as a good practical critic Pritchard tries to determine which of Eliot's poems still deserve even academic interest ("Prufrock" does, but "Gerontion" may not). He leaves it up to future generations to hear the personal note in Eliot that Randall Jarrell first detected. Charters, on the other hand, seems to think there's very little difference between a landmark work like "Howl" and the puerile, drugged mumbling of Michael McClure. This lack of practical discernment characterizes a number of the book's entries, especially in those areas where the writer is trying to sweep away the dune and reveal the forgotten glories. Writing about poets Amy Lowell, Sara Teasdale, Elinor Wylie, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Louise Bogan, Jeanne Larsen reminds us just how modernism à la Pound and Eliot served to squelch these poets because of its aversion not only to their elegant, at times brittle, lyricism, but, she argues, because of an aversion to women's love poetry. But when she tries to make a case for Amy Lowell as a writer of memorable lesbian erotica, it just doesn't wash. Lowell was a terrible poet, and the other four were good, particularly Louise Bogan.

The sand dune effect all but buries Robinson Jeffers in Lynn Keller's "The Twentieth Century Long Poem." After mentioning his name in regard to the long narrative poem, she pays no more attention to him or to the form. Her interest is in the modern sequence, as defined by M. L. Rosenthal and Sally Gall in their book on the subject. Though Keller understands that recent interest in the long poem is a response to the exhaustion of the lyric, she ends her essay with an obtuse statement about how nondiscursive patterns "point to a language in which women and colonized people might achieve liberty and self-portraiture." In fact, traditional narrative serves much more ably than the disjunctive techniques she refers to. How would Rita Dove's *Thomas and Beulah* or Garrett Hongo's "Stepchild" hold together without the binding of narrative? This is a vital point she also misses in her reference to Gwendolyn Brooks's "The Anniad" or Marilyn Hacker's *Love, Death and the Changing of the Seasons*. Her refusal to see the importance of narrative in the long poem may be why she won't touch Jeffers or mention a major achievement in the form like George Keithley's *The Donner Party*.

As valuable as a book like this is in unearthing what we might otherwise forget, when most of its contributors accept the ongoing sweep of modernism—and over twenty of its thirty-one entries deal with modern American poetry—many things will remain ignored or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

buried even deeper. The most interesting example of the conflict created by the sand dune effect and the conventional wisdom that modernism is an advance can be seen in the contrast between John McWilliams' "The Epic in the Nineteenth Century" and Dana Gioia's "Longfellow in the Aftermath of Modernism." McWilliams takes the view that James Fenimore Cooper was an epic poet, that *Moby Dick* was an epic poem (he even includes a politically correct nod to the racial balance aboard the *Pequod*), and that Whitman's "Song of Myself" displaces the traditional epic hero with the self. None of this is news, at least from the modern perspective. McWilliams dismisses *Hiawatha* along with some justly forgotten attempts at the epic, like Barlow's *The Columbiad* and a number of other "iads" (*The Coloniad*, *The Judead*). About *Hiawatha*, McWilliams writes:

> . . . when Longfellow raided Schoolcraft's research into Winnebago customs, fitted them into an overlay of Iroquois mythology, blithely transformed the whole into the tripping meter of the Finnish *Kalevala*, and then offered *Hiawatha* as a coherent series of North American Indian legends, the result could only be poetic make-up of the most transparent kind.

Such a history should probably record conventional wisdom like this somewhere in its voluminous pages. But how much more interesting it is to learn the following contradictory, fresh, and much more thoughtful assessment from Dana Gioia:

> The stylistic objections to *Hiawatha* . . . are largely based on misconceptions of Longfellow's intentions. The most frequent criticism is of the poem's meter . . . which has seemed too artificial and formulaic to some readers. The chief advantage of this measure, however, is that it isn't naturalistic. It was an overt distancing device, as was the incorporation of dozens of Ojibway words. These devices continuously remind the listener that *Hiawatha*'s mythic universe is not our world. . . . Although more often ridiculed than understood, the style of *Hiawatha* is in its own way as original as that of Pound's *Cantos*.

Gioia's entry asks us to think again about Longfellow, whose poetry is still part of the culture at large and whose occupation as a "poet professor" foreshadows the role most American poets play in the academy today. He is the antecedent of Eliot and Pound, a father they had to dispose of. Gioia makes the point at least three times that Pound was Longfellow's grandnephew. He also makes a case for the great variety of the poet's work, for his major narratives, *Hiawatha* and *Evangeline*, and for his many lyrics, which include a range of tone and subject no other American poet has equalled. And Longfellow has at least one modern heir who did not disown him—Robert Frost.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Still, I am afraid that when I read Longfellow's poems beside Whitman's or Dickinson's or even an English contemporary like Browning, there is always that aura of the Genteel Tradition about his language that makes me reluctant to endorse him as Gioia has done.

The sand dune effect isn't all bad. It also allows an enterprising and discerning critic to clarify an issue that was ambiguous, with a good deal of sweeping and polishing in one area. Two entries that give us a definitive outline of what we might only have guessed at are J. T. Barbarese's "Ezra Pound's Imagist Aesthetics: 'Lustra' to 'Mauberly' " and "Hart Crane's Difficult Passage." A third is W. S. Di Piero's "Public Music."

Barbarese argues that Pound was an imagist and never ceased to be one and that the visual dimension of his poetry, especially in the *Cantos*, was as important as the linguistic one. He also provides an accurate and serviceable definition of Imagism. It is "essentially an elliptical approach to poetic design, substituting juxtapositional for connected meanings." That more or less defines Pound's method and, furthermore, it characterizes those descendants of Pound who usually have only that elliptical approach in common with him. Barbarese is probably the most idiosyncratic of the writers assembled, given to obscure gems like "chthonian," "ouranian," "fideism," and my favorite, "pococurantism," a synonym for indifference. In his essay on Hart Crane he asserts that Crane was never a "vernacularist." Neither is Professor Barbarese. But he has an excellent sense of what makes modern poetry, and this also comes out in an observation comparing Pound and Crane. He finds Crane difficult often because there is no source, no allusive echo, for his difficult passages, whereas, the echo is an essential ingredient for Pound. In Pound's elliptical poetry "the inherent wisdom (and moral purpose) . . . is never to leave the scene of the crime." This seems brilliantly simple as a description of Pound's Modernism.

W. S. Di Piero's "Public Music" may be the most interesting and challenging entry, because he takes as his subject the problematic issue of American poetry and politics. He finds Pound a useful figure as well and contrasts him with George Oppen. In both poets he examines the difficulty of bringing public speech into poetry and in making poetry public. Pound fails, Di Piero claims, because "he lost his way by becoming snared in the very confusion his poem presents as a matrix for renewals." George Oppen, whose political activism served to silence his own poetry for twenty years, found that "the political lay in writing truthfully one's perceptions, not arguing one's beliefs." I am not sure if this issue will ever be settled when there are so many political avenues, each with its own lingo, inviting the poet to feel engaged. But Di Piero makes sense. "Poets," he writes, "cannot finesse idiosyncrasy so that it seems populist or communal." This may be the very reason that, as Auden wrote, "poetry makes nothing happen."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One reads a reference book like *The Columbia History of American Poetry* expecting information and good sense. If one is lucky, there will also be entries offering fresh perspectives that cut through conventional wisdom, like Dana Gioia's on Longfellow. And there will be only one or two that are so conventional in their restatement of status quo opinions, like McWilliams on the nineteenth-century epic poem, that one wonders why the author bothered and the editor did not. Most of the entries reflect the current topography of American poetry with a clear sense of why the sands lie as they now do. Cynthia Griffin writes about Emily Dickinson and Donald Pease about Walt Whitman with an up-to-date understanding of their current status in modern American poetry, to wit, as foremother and forefather. Pease reminds us that the Saturday Club, of which Longfellow was a member, rejected Whitman's application for membership. There is that strain of gentility to hold against Longfellow, though why one of the roughs would want to join the Saturday Club is worth wondering about. Margaret Dickie in "Women Poets and the Emergence of Modernism" asserts that Gertrude Stein, H.D., and Marianne Moore were "a century ahead" of their time because they were "not limited by the misogyny, reactionary politics, and conservative impulse that held back their male counterparts." Insofar as gender and other political issues have come to play a central role in literary criticism, Dickie's assertion has merit. Jay Parini states right off the bat in "Robert Frost and the Poetry of Survival" that Frost "was among the great poets of this century—or any century." It's good to hear that said, even though it is Stevens, as Helen Vendler describes him in her entry, who reigns supreme among Frost's male counterparts at the end of the century. Arnold Rampersad contributes a helpful entry on the Harlem Renaissance, touching on the conflicting attitudes of Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes about the degree of blackness their poetry should display. William W. Cook in his entry on the Black Arts Movement emphasizes the strengths of Amiri Baraka, Don Lee, and Sonia Sanchez as performers of their poetry, and also casts a dubious look at the work of Nikki Giovanni, characterized by some as "a black Rod McKuen." It is a pity that the most gifted African American poets of the century, Gwendolyn Brooks and Robert Hayden, do not have an entry to themselves. Instead they are merely referred to in the two entries on African American poetry and not in great detail. The most troubling entry is on Native American poetry. Not because there is an entry, but because it is clear that there is very little to say about a written tradition of poetry by Native Americans. There is no entry on Hispanic American or Asian American poetry and these genres, though also relatively new, are much more advanced. The problem for all of these ethnic genres is the one tacitly admitted in the entry on Native American poetry. Lacking a tradition, will future Native American poets have only the current generation, poets like Louise Erdrich, Leslie Silko, and Joy Harjo, to look back to?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sand dune effect swallows the fact that these accomplished writers were nurtured by a more extensive tradition.

As the history approaches the present day, it's easy to find fault with the representations. The editor, Jay Parini, is himself apologetic in his introduction that he has set aside no single chapter for Adrienne Rich or, perhaps, Adrienne Rich and a contemporary, as he has for John Ashbery and James Merrill, and Philip Levine and Charles Wright, who are the subjects of the last two entries. John Shoptaw uses Merrill and Ashbery to represent divisions in contemporary poetry between formalism and language-oriented poetry. Yet his actual analysis of the two poets is based on their long poems. He detects a strain of elitism in Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*, but he manages to suggest that in *Three Poems*, for example, Ashbery is actually comprehensible. Edward Hirsch refers to the poetics of Philip Levine and Charles Wright as "visionary" and states that Levine "has created a memorializing poetics of human separation and connections" and Wright "has defined a radiant metaphysics of absence and aspiration, of the longed-for presence of the divine." He traces the development of both poets (something Shoptaw does not try to do), but in the meantime makes these living masters sound posthumous, a necessary side-effect, I suppose, of a book like this.

Finally, *History* comes with surprises pleasant and unpleasant. The unpleasant surprise might better be called bizarre. It is Gregory Orr's "The Postconfessional Lyric" in which he vacillates among the terms lyric and dramatic lyric and postconfessional lyric in order to describe a kind of contemporary autobiographical poem and invokes Whitman and Keats at various stages as precursors. Mainly what the writers of the p-c lyric have in common, according to Orr, is a traumatized childhood, like Orr's own (his book *Gathering the Bones Together* is based on his accidental killing of his brother when they were children), which they also write about, like Orr. He creates a genealogy of poets that includes Jarrell, Kunitz, Bishop, James Wright, Levine, Rich, Bidart, Orr himself, Glück, and Olds. While acknowledging that the Confessional Poets broke the ground he is describing, he concludes:

> Perhaps one of the most inadvertent gifts of the confessionals was to blur the distinction between art and life. Such a blurring can have destructive and self-destructive consequences but can also have salutary effects: what can't be resolved in life can be brought over into art, where it is again engaged, again encountered by a self struggling to extract sustaining meaning from experience.

I'm sorry, but this makes poetry sound like therapy. Orr adds a series of strategies that the p-c poets employ to set them apart from the confessional poets. One of these is "the proportionate ego." According to Orr the p-c poet does not indulge, for example, in Robert

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lowell's excesses of appropriation. The kinder, gentler poet that Orr describes sounds as if he or she were made up by a committee of human potential experts.

The pleasant surprise is Claude J. Summers' "American Auden." Summers charts what he calls "the metamorphosis of the enfant terrible of English poetry into the religious Horatian ruminator of American poetry" and considers each of Auden's major long poems with a good deal of understanding and gives us some of the life Auden was living as an American when he wrote them. It is a pleasure to see this great poet treated to his own entry, to consider the sand dune effect working to his favor, as it mantles over some of Auden's most damaging and persistent critics. Summers ends his entry with the aptest lines anyone wrote about Auden after his death, these from Richard Howard's elegy:

> After you, because of you,
> all songs are possible.

There is not a poet writing in the English-speaking world who does not owe Auden something, usually a vital debt.

I imagine in another generation aspects of this book will look quaint, especially as it tries to map the current terrain. The future may look back and wonder why Robert Lowell had become only one of a number of poets treated in the entry on Confessional Poetry and why Elizabeth Bishop had to share an entry with Marianne Moore. It may look back and wonder why a unique master like Louis Simpson is nowhere mentioned. He actually would have provided an excellent contrast to Merrill or Ashbery, Levine or Wright. And when the future does look back, perhaps it will see an edition in which the numerous typos and misspellings are corrected and the index is adjusted for accuracy. Meanwhile, we can be grateful for this history which tries to reveal more than it conceals, to retrieve and preserve more than it discards and dismisses, before the sands shift again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THOMAS FILBIN

Making a Scene

I HAD THE BAD FORTUNE TO BREAK MY COLLARBONE just as I was beginning this review assignment. A fractured clavicle is not excruciatingly painful, but it does make one uncomfortable at every turn for a week and is followed by being tied up in a harness for a few months after that. Unable at first to read in any position, I took the low road of watching television, channel surfing for something that could distract me. (Seeing Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz again in black and white only made me remember how young I was when I realized I could never be a well adjusted American since I found them abysmally unfunny.) I rapidly reached my limit with the inane, however, as well as with news programs that told you nothing, and the seemingly endless parade of polygamists, transvestites, and the women who love them too much. On the third day I invented a method of propping a book up on my lap with cushions, and a sincere and euphoric gratitude came over me that there were books and people who wrote them.

Out of several dozen volumes which comprised the pile of possibles, five novels absorbed me for perhaps the predictably simple-minded reason that they made me forget my discomfort. I was a sick man after all, and excused pleasing myself in reading as I did the indulgence in sweets. But knowing that pleasure alone is not a critical standard, I set out to identify something artistic in my selections which could explain my being so engrossed. In every case the compelling virtue these books shared was mastery of the dramatist's craft of scene writing. They didn't tell me what I was supposed to be visualizing, but rather made the images themselves come clearly to mind. The appeal of this traditional narrative technique lies in its being able to transform the reader's consciousness into a stage where the portrayal is too vivid for one to grow inattentive. In good theater, people aren't fumbling for their car keys or thinking of tomorrow's appointments. As Ethyl Barrymore said about controlling the audience during dramatic moments: "I never let them cough. They wouldn't dare."

Thomas Flanagan's *The End of the Hunt*[1] is his third novel about Ireland, and it attempts to make sense of the tortuous journey toward independence that followed the Easter Rebellion of 1916. The brief seizure of the General Post Office won no victory, but the execution of

[1] THE END OF THE HUNT, by *Thomas Flanagan*. Dutton. $24.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the leaders provided martyrs whose pictures were hung in the homes and public houses even of those not inclined to sever the connection with England. After World War I, the Republicans launched a campaign of guerilla warfare and assassination that brought a British response of terror and reprisal. Ultimately the government of Lloyd George and his minister Winston Churchill did what they vowed they would never do: negotiate at 10 Downing Street with men whose hands had "touched the springs of murder." The Irish delegation in turn did what they vowed never to do: accept something less than a republic, a creature to be called the "Irish Free State" which would be a British dominion with an oath of loyalty to the king. This compromise produced a civil war in which the Free Staters suppressed the Republicans. A new Irish constitution in 1937 unilaterally declared sovereignty and called its name Eire, and after another world war it withdrew from the Commonwealth. The British Parliament recognized the independence of southern Ireland in 1949, but not the six northern counties which comprised Ulster. The story has had no final chapter, with three thousand people being killed in the north in the last quarter century.

Flanagan's book covers the period of 1916-1923 through the lives of actors close enough to have had firsthand knowledge, but who would have been less than major players. Patrick Prentiss, a Dublin barrister who lost an arm as an officer of the British army in Flanders, and Janice Nugent, a war widow whose husband died at Suvla Bay, typify the upper middle class, which although Catholic, had prospered under the regime. That group never seriously imagined an independent Ireland, and would have taken home rule within the empire as the best of all possible worlds. Janice's lover, Christopher Blake, a Republican official, and his friend Frank Lacy, a Republican army commander who carries a copy of Virgil in the same sack as his pistol, are of a different sort. They see armed resistance as the only way to realize a historical imperative that calls for Irish freedom. As Frank slips from safe houses in Dublin to hillside ambushes, we are unavoidably engaged in forming judgments, examining what causes him to pray to God one moment and then kill an hour later. What do we think of people who in ordinary times would be schoolmasters and innkeepers, but for a patriotic cause will put a bullet through a man dragged from a train?

The countryside itself is depicted by Flanagan as a metaphor for the deadly conflict. As Lacy waits to raid a convoy he sees "Across pale, faint-clouded skies the birds of winter, purposeful in flight, hawks and kestrels, vigilant for quick movements along the ground." His Ireland is ". . . rooks circling low above the stones of shattered friaries, nights in sheltered farmhouses, hillside bothies, song weaving outwards past turf smoke, tobacco smoke toward star-pierced blackness beyond which lay immensities of . . . black bog."

Historical novels have to overcome a prejudice against them that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they are little more than ripping yarns, fine spectacles with manor houses and battlefields, but of no literary distinction. *The End of the Hunt* acquits itself well on that count, for as readable as it is, the moral dilemmas are always lurking just beyond the light of the street lamp. Flanagan's previous books, *The Year of the French* and *The Tenants of Time*, resemble this one in giving a thorough and detailed treatment of Irish history which can be enjoyed by a reader having no previous knowledge of the subject.

Split-Levels[2] by Thomas Rayfiel is a suburban-noir mystery dressed in the finery of a satire on mysteries and mystery satires. Set in a suburb that could be any postwar subdivision, the dialogue contains not only the melody of conversation but echoing chords which capture the ennui and emptiness of lawn land. This is a beach book for those who remember Naugahyde, Formica, and their fathers' endless quest to vanquish crabgrass.

"Evening in the suburbs is artificial," Rayfiel tells us, ". . . you can never see the sun, just its increasingly oblique rays, flaying all substance from the abandoned toys, the cars, the clipped bushes, until everything is reduced to a facade. Stare long enough and the whole street loses its depth, becomes a painting."

Allen Stanley's father has been slashed to death in the ugly ceramic tile bath of his home, and when Allen turns up to settle affairs, he finds himself the object of suspicion by the police, and an object of desire by the woman next door, as well as by a young library aide, and perhaps even the funeral director. Allen's sister mysteriously disappeared years before, and a dark secret about his father's dalliances with teen-aged girls starts to hint at a horrible possibility. The detectives are unwittingly ironic and hilarious in their investigation, as if instead of attending the police academy they had prepared themselves by studying film footage of Telly Savalas and Peter Falk. Rayfiel's characters are moved less by intention than by impulse, and seek adventures to distract them from their unhappiness rather than cure themselves of it. This portrayal of people whose leisure is aimless because their existence lacks meaning has a dimension beyond mere humor. It is refreshing to find a story that is deucedly clever without being one bit smarmy and self-conscious. I hope a presidential election or consumer opinion research is the next deserving object of Thomas Rayfiel's arch sensibilities.

There have been numerous World War II novels which deal with soldiery, the resistance, and the Holocaust, but there is little in English about life on the losing side. Civilians in an aggressor country usually pay a harsh price when the tides of initial victory turn back on them, and this was certainly true in the bombing zones of Germany during

[2] SPLIT-LEVELS, by *Thomas Rayfiel*. Simon & Schuster. $20.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the last year of the war. Raymond Kennedy's *The Bitterest Age*[3] is the story of ten-year-old Ingeborg Maas, a great little soul who survives air raids, the impending arrival of the Russians, and the absence of her father whom everyone but Ingeborg believes lost on the eastern front.

This precocious girl becomes the strength of her mother Ursula and little brother Andreas after they flee Berlin for Potsdam, the city where Frederick the Great built a palace and which became home to the Hohenzollern emperors. Ingeborg is charming and generous, a reader, and one who attracts the attention of adults. The desperation of their circumstances increases with every English and American bombing run, and the time is given over to finding food, hiding in cellars during the raids, and coping with near starvation in the final days before the Russian army enters the city.

The relentless sound of guns has eroded any sense of safety as "From every direction came the rumble of artillery, a soft incessant thunder as of a spring storm that would neither relent nor pass, but which by now had become as much a part of the weather as the splash of raindrops on the windowsill."

Kennedy has turned in a marvel of sustained writing because he has carefully paced the story in a way consistent with the psychological intake and responses of a ten-year-old. She is a plausible and significant work of innocence against a backdrop of brutality. By not succumbing to the temptation to make a sweeping moral summary of this or any war, Kennedy has located a profound moment of humanity with an excellent and touching book.

In November of 1966, the Arno River flooded its banks and pushed an inundation of water and debris into the capital of Renaissance art: the city of Florence and its galleries, libraries, archives, and churches. Priceless paintings, books, and manuscripts were threatened with destruction, if not from the initial deluge, then from the damage the water, mud, and minerals left on them. In Robert Hellenga's beguiling *The Sixteen Pleasures*,[4] Margot Harrington, a twenty-nine-year-old book conservator from Chicago, arrives as an "angelo di fango," a "mud angel," one of many volunteers from Europe and America to help the Italian authorities save and restore the treasures. Unable to find suitable lodgings, she is put up in a convent, and to her astonishment finds herself, although not a Catholic, at home in these surroundings. The sisters have a fine library courtesy of a de Medici donation, and they discover a rare and fantastically obscene book of drawings and poems sewn inside a prayer book which becomes the object of Margot's labors, as well as the prize sought by both the Bishop of Florence and Margot's lover, Dr. Alessandro Postiglione,

[3] THE BITTEREST AGE, by *Raymond Kennedy*. Ticknor & Fields. $22.95.
[4] THE SIXTEEN PLEASURES, by *Robert Hellenga*. Soho. $22.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the urbane and companionable head restorer of works of fine art in the province of Tuscany.

Margot does not surprise herself by falling in love with Sandro because she is in love with all of Italy. He is older and bald, but represents the sophisticated gentility of the world she reveres. Fluent in Italian from living there as a student with her late mother, a teacher of art history, Margot absorbs the excitement of events, and fends off the chicanery of characters pursuing the book or merely their own vanity.

Margot's sound instincts about people extend to everyone but herself. Confident with others, she is at times incapacitated with her own sense of being worse than a failure: a nonentity. She grows haunted by the idea that there are or should be two of her: the simple, diligent book conservator, and the other, the one who might have been elaborate and charismatic, ". . . a ghostly double who'd made love to Fabio Fabbriani on the beach in Sardegna, who'd gone to Harvard, who'd apprenticed with Roger Eglantine in London, who'd been profiled in a Dewar's ad, and who'd gone on to become the first woman to head the conservation department at the Library of Congress—a me who mattered to the world."

Hellenga's fable is a sweet, clever read which gives us picturesque views of churches and piazzas, and a chance to witness the murals being saved and touch the leather books laid out to be dried. Human disingenuousness and generosity, lust and loneliness all have walk-on parts. It is wonderfully Renaissance, a commedia dell'arte, and deftly modern all at the same time. When she has a brief slip of her Italian with Alessandro, Margot ". . . blushes; not a gradual flushing of the face and neck, but a violent rush of pigment, as if someone had thrown a bucket of cinnabar red in her face, enough for a large canvas by Titian."

Margot's work gives us a detailed, but not pedantic look at the art of manuscript salvaging: "The job of interleaving two thousand books with absorbent paper was time consuming and unpleasant. The vellum used for old books will last forever, but it's generally been sized with animal glue that gives off a powerful odor when wet—the mud angels who went down into the basement of the Biblioteca Nazionale had to wear gas masks—and forms a nasty scum that makes your fingers stick together. The books become bricklike and yet fragile at the same time. Each indifferent strain of mold has its own characteristic visual and tactile properties that might test the resolve even of those accustomed to dressing the wounds of lepers."

This novel is honest and serious while at the same time droll, not at all like the buffoonery or exaggeration that passes for satirical fiction these days. Hellenga's writing is like a rich Italian zuppa: filled with everything, but always in the right proportion, a blend of flavors, not a heap of ingredients.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Every city deserves a writer who knows where the men go to drink after work and what the women feel while waiting for them to come home. James Carroll might not be Zola or Dickens, but Boston is lucky to have him. His work has sometimes been criticized as less than profound, but it is always fresh because it is so tuned in to the social dynamics of his settings. In his latest novel, *The City Below*,[5] he takes up a study in opposites, the Doyle brothers of Charlestown, a blue collar section of the city where the Irish-American culture dominates all attitudes and institutions.

Terry is a young college Democrat who campaigns for John Kennedy in 1960, but then spends most of the decade studying for the priesthood, only to walk away before ordination because he cannot subscribe to an oath of support for the pope's decision in 1968 to condemn birth control. After a disillusioning stint in politics, he turns his estimable skills to business and finds himself by 1984 a wealthy real estate executive in the middle of the city's building boom. His brother Nick is a power figure of another sort, a fixer and hustler with mob ties who eventually graduates to drug dealing and money laundering.

Carroll's Boston is replete with whiskey priests, political operatives, and men with plastic American flag pins in their caps who grouse at the corner pub about the court mandated integration of the schools by busing, an issue which became a national news story in the 1970s. Buses were stoned and the federal judge in the case was hanged in effigy from more than one building. A true portrait of ignominy for the erstwhile "Athens of America" was the photograph of a black attorney being speared and beaten with, of all things, an American flag on a pole by a white youth in broad daylight on City Hall Plaza.

As heartily as Carroll rips the ignorance and prejudices of his "Townies," he fiercely defends them from the snobbish glances of the North Shore suburbanites who pass the housing project on their way home and "imagine vacant-eyed, unattended teenagers with freckles bridging their noses, and pregnant mothers tugging at their children's ears. They would picture Irish gypsies, young hooligans and drunks, knowing nothing of the lengths to which those mothers went to keep the threadbare clothing of their children clean, or of the natural genius corner boys had for cracking jokes, or of the rare camaraderie of tavern haunters who thought nothing of putting half their gin rummy winnings in the St. Vincent's poorbox, which sat by the pickle jar on every tap corner in the neighborhood."

Regrettably the book is weakened by too many contrived coincidences, a Hollywood action movie climax, and a body which falls through a glass door at the right moment. Carroll's literary work seems to have script potential in the back of its mind, but even the

[5] THE CITY BELOW, by *James Carroll*. Houghton Mifflin. $22.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

defects can't draw away from the integrity of the narrative. If he is a tragedian, it is in a way that posits tragedy as inevitable rather than suitable to the human condition. Nobility and idealism are present in Carroll's work as things to be valued, even when they won't be able to determine the outcome.

At home on the couch with books heaped around me, I had the luxury of time to reflect upon the principle of dramatization in fiction. Rendering imagined scenes in such a way that they equal or exceed the vividness of events we directly experience is the art part of the scribbler's trade. My medical condition only reinforced a view I have held for a long time: a book read on a train which makes you forget for a while that you are on a train has succeeded on that count alone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GARY KRIST

A Thunder of Hooves in the Drawing Room

ANY RICH AND ACTIVE WRITING LIFE creates by-products—reviews, essays, travel articles, profiles, and other occasional pieces—that accumulate in the odd corners of a writer's opus until they take on substantial heft. If the writer is good enough, these pieces, while perhaps not originally intended to appear between hard covers, may eventually be gathered into a collection and published. If the writer is better than good enough, the collection may even represent a significant literary achievement, the whole cohering despite the varied nature of the parts.

In his latest book, *Excursions in the Real World*, William Trevor (certainly a writer who can safely be described as "better than good enough") has achieved this kind of organic-seeming miscellany, though one with a difference.[1] Trevor has taken pieces written at various times and for various occasions in his life, supplemented them with new work, and fashioned them into a memoir. The result is a curious hybrid, a memoir not so much of the writer himself or of his milieu, but rather of the various bits of life and art that have somehow left a lasting impression on him. In fact, the person whose life is ostensibly being recalled in these gathered pieces, far from being an overwhelming presence, is actually discernible in them only by an act of inference.

One could have predicted, I suppose, that a writer like Trevor—arguably the English-speaking world's premier practitioner of a certain brand of artistically distanced fiction—would create this kind of elusive autobiography. His work has always seemed to me at odds with the confessional subjectivity of a lot of contemporary literature. In Trevor's fiction, one never senses the author grinding personal axes behind the scenery. A Trevor story represents, above all else, an act of sympathetic imagination, in which the author's sensibility is present only as a tool to bring to life the sensibility of his characters, who are always his true subject. What I've read of Trevor's fiction rarely if ever has the feel of autobiography, so I suppose it makes

[1] EXCURSIONS IN THE REAL WORLD: Memoirs, by *William Trevor*. Alfred A. Knopf. $23.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sense (though a somewhat ironic sense) that the same can be said of his memoirs.

While the book does contain several pieces of conventional autobiography—accounts of the small towns of the author's youth, portraits of his parents and tutors—the bulk of these *Excursions* would find no place in the reminiscences of a more self-involved artist. What Trevor gives us are mostly what he calls "personal fascinations and enthusiasms"—the places, people, and situations that somehow have remained "snagged in the memory." He doesn't write about how these various stimuli affected him or his work. Nor does he draw parallels or contrasts between other characters and himself. In fact, the word "I," so prominent in most literary memoirs, appears with remarkable infrequency here.

But in a chronicle like this one, as the author himself admits, "the recorder cannot remain entirely in the shadows, much as he might wish to do so." And so we do find tantalizing hints of Trevor here and there—in, for instance, the choice of writers he profiles. His selection goes beyond the obvious Irishmen (Joyce, Yeats, Sean O'Casey, and Beckett) to include Somerville and Ross—a pair of upper-class Victorian ladies who collaborated on a travel book called *Through Connemara in a Governess Cart* ("On a dull day, they embellished," he claims)—as well as William Gerhardie, a failed sort of genius who seems to have been his own best reviewer:

> He was ravenous for praise, fearful of even a hint of criticism. Other writers of the time, sensing the considerable promise of his novels as soon as they appeared, were generous. But this generosity is noticeably most lavish when Gerhardie himself reports it. "What do I hear? Gerhardie? The very man I always wanted to meet," cooed H.G. Wells. "You're a genius," pronounced Shaw.

It's tempting, of course, to try to find hints of self-revelation in these selections. For instance, Trevor writes of Somerville and Ross that

> . . . it was isolation again—the very distance that lay between two upper-class women and the Ireland they wrote about—that permitted their talent to breathe and develop. By chance, or accident of birth, they discovered the perspective that art demands.

Reading these sentences in the venue of a memoir, one can't help wondering whether Trevor is describing himself here as much as he is Somerville and Ross. Is he hinting that his own art has been possible only as a result of a distance kept from the subjects he writes about? Knowing what we know about Trevor's fiction, the answer would seem to be yes. But it's difficult to say for sure, and Trevor is certainly not one to tip his hand in such a matter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And really, it's only when one decides to give up trying to find the author subtly encoded in these pieces that many of them can be fully enjoyed. Trevor tells some wonderful stories—of pitiful, lost faculty members at the private schools of his youth, of car-battery salesmen trying to make merry in off-season Sussex, of lavishly eccentric toilers in the advertising industry of the early 1960s (Trevor wrote for a while in the offices of Marchant Smith, "one of the greatest copywriters of his time" and the originator of the immortal slogan "Top People Take The Times"). Trevor is as entertainingly deadpan as ever in this book, as when he reports that:

> Briefly I had received a modest weekly wage in return for calling for a designated brand of beer in selected Northside public houses, whether as an encouragement to others or in an effort to establish if the beer was being stocked I never fully ascertained; and since inebriation invariably prevented me from accurately completing the forms I was provided with by the brewery, my assistance was soon dispensed with.

But the tone of the book is by no means universally light. In "Field of Battle," Trevor grapples with the unhappy marriage of his parents, the details of which can only be read between the lines of youthful memory:

> The marriage of parents is almost always mysterious: the sensual elements scarcely bear thinking about, the romantic past can only be guessed at, and all such curiosity invariably comes too late. . . . The cold facts, all that is known, tell nothing: what happened, or did not happen, is private territory, a disappointment guarded in life and death.

Trevor does manage, however, to recreate the unseen elements of their marriage—extrapolating the early, innocent entry into romance, the silent discord hidden behind the noise of everyday life, the toll taken by constant moves around the Irish countryside. His parents stayed together through these years solely for the sake of the children, he concludes, and when the children were grown up, they separated, never to meet again—a sad, almost archetypal story in which Trevor finds a kind of heroism:

> [I]n retrospect there is something gallant about their efforts to hold together the family their one-time love had brought into existence. Their perseverance was full of a self-sacrifice that was not apparent while they were making it; and there was a courageous honesty in their refusal to hide from their children the plight their marriage had become. They did not cover up; there was no hypocrisy. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sometimes Trevor finds in a character from his past an expression of an entire era. "Assia," for instance, begins with a flurry of pop sociology that would undoubtedly have pleased Trevor's old advertising mentor, Marchant Smith:

> The sixties in London had the flavour of a dream. After the drabness of the previous decade, in which nothing more exciting happened than Ban-the-Bomb marches, the Suez fiasco and a dog propelled into space, all of a sudden there was the razzmatazz of Carnaby Street and the E-Type Jag, and smart Mary Quant bringing fashion they could afford to shopgirls and typists. Flower people ran barefoot in the park, James Bond pushed aside the fuddy-duddy heroes who still trailed a Bulldog Drummond sense of decency and a stiff upper lip. Cannabis was in, LSD if you were daring. Sex set up its stall. *Jesus Christ is alive and well*, the graffiti said, *and working on a less ambitious project.*
>
> Fantasy arrived in London in the 1960s. "It's fantastic!" was the cry as wives were swapped at parties and there was dancing without steps. . . . In 1962 a young man in a lounge bar won a wager of a shilling by kissing on the lips a girl who was a stranger to him: she'd have slapped his face in the nineteen fifties, and taken him to court in the nineties. But in the sixties—mid-century breathing space between the World Wars and AIDS—everybody laughed and anything went.

This is not great prose, perhaps (sometimes even excellent Homer nods, as Horace complained), but it serves as the backdrop to a character sketch of remarkable complexity and mystery. Assia, "tall and beautiful, her features reminiscent of Sophia Loren in a tranquil moment," is an elusive figure—of Russian abstraction, with hints of Israel and Canada mixed in, though no one has quite been able to pin her down about her background. She arrives on the scene married—happily, one supposes—to a poet named David Wevill. "Charming, attractive, unobtrusive, they were Scott Fitzgerald people sixties-style, their innocence brushed over with sophistication, their devotion to one another taken for granted." Assia would do spontaneous, sixties-style things like order roses to be sent to the new wife of her ex-husband (billing them, of course, to her ex). And, though not a liar, she would nevertheless fabricate bountifully: "Liars lie in order to obscure," Trevor writes; "Assia exaggerated only in the interests of what she saw as a greater veracity and, as her voice continued, doubts slipped away."

She tells him of meeting that other remarkable sixties couple—Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath—and being invited over to tea. One thing leads to another, and soon she is the Other Woman in that famous relationship. It's a typical thing to have happened in that time, Trevor implies, but Plath is hardly a typical person for it to have happened to.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She killed herself shortly thereafter—a staggering blow to Assia. And, alas, the times were already changing:

> When Lee Harvey Oswald did his thing it wasn't so good. Nor when Brady and Hindley did theirs. Steven Ward's loveliest lovely was in gaol, the osteopath himself was dead. . . . The seeds of Europe's Vietnam were germinating in Belfast and Derry. With half the decade to go yet, the fun fair was sleazy at the edges.

Much later, Trevor sees Assia again. She is divorced, the mother of a small child, talking of marrying yet again. Trevor advises against marriage—some people seem not to be made for the institution—but she still seems game, still telling her fabulous, half-believable tales. There is, however, a sense of defeat now to her storytelling. And Trevor catches a glimpse of something else underneath:

> "Actually I'm afraid," she murmured, before she smiled again and went away.
>
> A month or so later Assia killed her child and then herself.

But the most revealing portrait here—revealing, that is, of Trevor and his work—is that of "The Warden's Wife," one Mary *née* Savery (we never learn her married name), spouse of the headmaster of St. Columba's school, where Trevor was a student. "In all sorts of ways," Trevor writes, "it was at St. Columba's where I first became aware that black and white are densities of more complicated grays." And certainly the Warden's wife qualifies as a complicated shade of gray. A shadowy and inscrutable figure on the periphery of school life, shy to the point of mortification, she nonetheless acquires a reputation as a kind of sensualist:

> Tongue-tied among her husband's prefects at the lunchtime High Table, she was quoted as having once referred, out of the blue, to breast-feeding. So the rumour began that beneath an unprepossessing exterior, and perhaps related to her beauty in the past, this woman was more than a little aware of sex, her reference to her breasts as much evidence of it as her interest in "what went on" between her daughter and her followers. That she was allied to a man who was the declared enemy of the sensual life in all its aspects struck none of us as tragedy.

It's the very unlikeliness of her alliance with the headmaster—a cockney buffoon who is an object of fun among his students—that intrigues Trevor about her. She is obviously a serious, intelligent woman. So he wonders about her: "Did she, as she pondered in her flowerbeds, shuffle through her regrets, or wish she had her life over again?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The answer—if it is an answer—comes only years later, when he reads her obituary in the *Old Columban*. In it he discovers, to his amazement, that during her years at St. Columba's she had become an expert on horse-racing, and regularly attended race-meetings. The realization comes to Trevor as sheer aesthetic delight:

> No one had ever said the Warden's wife was good for a tip; no one had ever imagined her laying an on-course bet. She did not seek inside information from Cog Chapman, whose father had a stables. . . . Yet this woman, who on the face of it had been smudged away to nothing, dwelt profitably on form among the callous prefects at High Table lunches, while her husband held forth about potatoes or recalled the day he met de Valera.

In Trevor's fascination with this woman we can trace the roots of his distinctive vision. Here we find a classic example of his extraordinary ordinary characters, with their extravagant internal lives that serve as refuge from the exterior blandness. If Mary Savery hadn't really existed, I suspect, Trevor would have created her. And it's this aspect of his sensibility—his perception of the outrageous abundance that exists beneath the most mundane surfaces of life—that, to my mind, lifts his work far beyond the limits of a safe and decorous classicism.

This is, in fact, the central irony of Trevor's work—this cosmic joke about the wild opulence lying at the heart of everyday life. And nowhere is the joke more slyly told than in the incantatory conclusion to this most unmemoirlike memoir, in which Trevor imagines Mary Savery's musings during one of her husband's dreary afternoon teas:

> Tea is poured and sponge cake cut, the teacups passed about. Deaf in her solitude, the Warden's wife muses among gaudy silks enriched with hoops and diamonds, half-moons and stars. Held-back wagers are placed, trainers offer a final word, and then the old-faced jockeys leap sprightly to the saddle. In the drawing-room the precious metal pouch is declared once more to have been the repository of holy writings. In the drawing-room there is the thunder of hooves.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EMILY GROSHOLZ

Love and the Creation of Value

How can one write a philosophical book about love? Love seems to be a topic more fit for poets and musicians than for philosophers. Yet in his well-organized and unpretentious book, *The Pursuit of Love*,[1] the philosopher Irving Singer manages to say something illuminating about this elusive topic. The colors on the butterfly's wings are well and critically discriminated, but the butterfly is not pinned to the page.

The Pursuit of Love reveals two of Singer's most attractive qualities as a thinker: his hostility to reductionism on the one hand, and his impatience with dogmatism on the other. These qualities inform the critical project of the book (to examine influential but reductionist accounts of love, like those of Plato, Augustine, Kant, Freud, and Sartre), as well as its positive project (to extend and refine an account of how we give meaning to life by creating values). For Singer, our various ways of loving are central to the creation of value, that activity in which each one of us becomes a Prospero, and even the drabbest neighborhood a metamorphic island.

Singer writes as an explorer, a metaphysician, a pluralist. The lovelorn will find no useful advice here (this is not, thank god, a self-help book), only diffuse admonitions against ethical intolerance, ontological monism, and the siren lure of univocal theories. Thus Singer opens the book by examining two myths about love prevalent in Western, post-romantic societies: that love is the principle of the universe, and that love merges those it brings together. Characteristically, Singer does not say that those who project the strongest human emotion onto the universe are wrong. He only says that we should be reflective about such projection, for love seems to manifest itself differently from culture to culture, as well as between humans and animals, and humans and inanimate nature. He also adds that those who dismiss out of hand the reality of love as it may exist external to the human social world should question their own certainty. (From time to time throughout this book, Singer observes that strict materialism and strict atheism are themselves forms of faith.) And while he acknowledges that love yields a delicious or threatening sense of union with the Other, he argues that it must be understood not as a

[1] THE PURSUIT OF LOVE, by *Irving Singer*. Johns Hopkins University Press. $25.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

merging, but as an interdependence that preserves the autonomy and distinctness of the selves involved. In passages that come as close to stating articles of faith as any in the book, Singer asserts that "a confusion of ego boundaries, the sense of unsureness as to where I end and you, the person I love, begin," is a dangerous illusion. (The primacy of ego boundaries for Singer does locate him pretty squarely in the Western tradition and the late twentieth century.)

There is nothing a philosopher likes better than a good set of distinctions. In his attempt to un-merge aspects of love that have typically been confused or reduced, Singer offers a useful suite of them. In the second chapter, he distinguishes among the love of persons, things, and ideals; in the third, among aspects of sexual love which he calls the libidinal, the erotic, and the romantic; in the fourth, between self love and social love, and thence among forms of social love, parental, filial, peer love or friendship, and the universalizing love of humanity; and in the fifth, between human and divine love. These distinctions are then deployed in the penultimate chapter, "Civilization and Autonomy," to provide a trenchant critique of Freud's pessimism in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and recollected in the tranquillity of the final chapter, "Love, and Do as You Will."

Clearly, for Singer love cannot be defined univocally. Along with his distinctions, he offers the reader a series of family resemblances. His theory is then a kind of loose unity where the distinguished elements are woven back together again in complex and multifarious ways, more like a tapestry than a striped sheet. So for example, having separated love of things, love of persons, and love of ideals in the second chapter, he goes on to exhibit their overlaps and complementarities. Love of things includes not only objects like cars or peaches, but the many ways in which we are attracted to and enjoy the material world: the smell of summer in the countryside west of Philadelphia, the taste of crème de marron, the regular appearance of the *New York Times*. Singer chides the great world religions that teach us to set all such love aside, for puritanism both overlooks rich sources of value, and neglects the important problem of how the love of things may best be harmonized or integrated with the love of persons and the love of ideals.

Conversely, though the love of ideals is also an important source of value, one that organizes civil and religious institutions on the social level and motivates disinterested service and self-sacrifice on the personal level, it should not be overestimated. For it can lead us to despise the ideals of others and *pari passu* the others who hold them; and in that sense, it is potentially more dangerous than the love of things. The task of integrating the love of ideals with the other two modes of love may be the hardest of all. The love of persons, finally, may involve the love of things (we commonly enjoy the physical presence of whomever we love) and the love of ideals (we often love where we admire), yet it is also, irreducibly, an appreciation of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

complex uniqueness of the loved one. We accept friends or spouses as they are, with all their warts, spiritual or physical; indeed, love may even make us fond of those material or ideal defects just because they are part of the person's complex identity.

Of all these three modes of love, the love of persons is for Singer the most potent source of value. Affectionate relations with other people lie at the heart of our activity of world-making, of rendering reality meaningful and compelling, despite the dangers of disappointment, jealousy, and abandonment such relations may entail. Moreover, the love of persons, as Singer defines it, lends itself especially well to integration with the two other modes of love, for the gratifying presence of the other is both material and ideal, and something else besides, beyond either. This chapter might well send the reader to the more systematic treatment of *présence* in the writings of the philosopher Lévinas, or its less systematic but no less profound treatment in the writings of the poet Bonnefoy.

Singer's discussion of the love of persons, extending over the next three chapters, begins with sexual love. Though this dimension of love might seem most "natural," Singer makes clear that sexual love in all its aspects is structured by culture, and that indeed our sexual activity has a significant role to play in our world-making. The distinctions drawn in this chapter are among Singer's most thought-provoking. He first distinguishes between the libidinal and the erotic, taking issue with Freud's tendency to conflate and naturalize them. While it is true that in some sense human beings have a reproductive drive, no one has ever demonstrated a simple parallel between animal sexual behavior and that of humans. Even less plausible than the assumption that libido drives us as it drives other mammals (if it does) is Freud's contention that, first, our ancestral loss of quadrupedal posture, and, second, the more recent constraints of culture, have led to the repression and frustration of our libido. Libido is a word that points to what is given in our sexuality; but human beings never express the given, since our activity (eating, copulating, walking) is never merely what it is precisely because it is always expressive (of our self-consciousness on the one hand and of the world on the other). Moreover, Singer adds, the fact that libido, the given, is altered by being expressed and expressive, does not mean that it is thereby perverted, wronged, fallen, or frustrated.

Singer claims that the erotic should not be conflated with the libidinal. By eros he seems to mean sex in the imagination, the ear, the eye: an electrical intensification of our relations with people (and perhaps also animals, plants, and inanimate or divine things) that stirs our passions without provoking our genitals. Eros like libido is promiscuous, but its play is more civilized and gentle: those operatic seducers, Don Giovanni and the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, made the monstrous error of acting out eros as if it were libido. Why the erotic exists, why we feel it for some people and not others, why it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

makes life more lively, are enduring mysteries. "Our world is a place of many mysteries." Singer admits the fact, and moves on.

The last part of this discussion reflects upon the task of integrating the libidinal and the erotic with the aspect of sexual love, the romantic, that takes a particular person as its object. Half the novels written in the last two hundred years attest that this integration is by no means simple. Yet as Singer and his friend Jean Hagstrum (who has written at length on "companionate marriage") agree, the weaving together of the libidinal, the erotic, and the romantic is a fascinating and rewarding process that can last a lifetime. It brings the playful anarchies of the body and the imagination into enduring relation with a real person, and embeds (so to speak) that relationship in society. Thus too it brings sexual love closer to the other kinds of social love, discussed in the following two chapters.

To preface his account of how we may love the other (parent, child, friend, fellow human being, God), Singer asks how we may love ourselves. He rejects the Lutheran tradition that all self love is sinful or evil, and that this selfishness infects all human love, so that only God's love is worthy of the title; and he also rejects positions taken by Freud or Sartre, who tacitly accept the premise that self love is selfish and so must always remain in essential conflict with love of the other. By contrast, Singer argues that self love is a positive affirmation of our separateness, a flourishing within particularity, and a source of meaning independent of love of the other. The task of loving within society is then to integrate or harmonize these distinct and yet quite compatible affections.

So, for example, the Christian ideal of parental love as the sacrifice of one's selfish interests to those of the child, as well as the sociobiological view of parental love as a mask and vehicle for one's selfish interests in the child as carrier of certain genes, both miss the mark. Both views are practically useless, for they teach us nothing about how to honor and reconcile our own needs with those of others; and they are theoretically defective, for they cannot explain why and how love within families brings new meaning into the world. If the love between parents and children is just an imperfect version of the love of God (given a priori) or just the repetition of genetic patterns (given a posteriori), then it cannot be creative. But for Singer, the way in which family life creates valuable new worlds is obvious, a central fact for which the philosopher of love must account.

The balancing between self love and social love that children learn in (balanced) families makes children ready for friendship and altruism, the extended, more abstract benevolence that leads people to identify with their country and the world. It may also make them ready for the love of God. But once again, Singer warns against the temptation to reduce and subordinate the multifarious kinds of human love to either the love of humanity or the love of God. As a pluralist, Singer prefers religious doctrines which hold that the love of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

God is unlike other kinds of love and is moreover not a substitute for them; and he prefers religious philosophies that tolerate many different styles of harmonizing human and divine love. He admits that he himself is not very religious, but since "our world is a place of many mysteries," he has no wish to espouse the dogmatism of atheism. Religions, especially harmonious ones, also contribute a great deal to human world-making. At this point in the book, the reader can see how much ethical and metaphysical work Singer requires his notion of harmony or integration to do. In a sense, the whole book can be read as an illustration and exposition of that notion.

Yet in order to make this central notion clearer, perhaps Singer should have given closer attention to the problem of evil. Writing as a thinker, Singer castigates reduction as a theoretical error that collapses important distinctions and so misses the central problem of how distinct aspects of reality should be integrated. But writing as an engaged human agent, Singer must admit that this error is not merely theoretical but also moral, and moral error has another name. Those who do not integrate reality properly are unhappy; they suffer and make those around them suffer. If integration is the heart of world-making and value-creation, then presumably reductive strategies may unmake worlds, flatten them, and ruin values. How and why does this happen?

Singer is so committed to pluralism and tolerance that he only rarely expresses his own disapproval of certain kinds of human action. Yet surely his enthusiasm for integration carries with it a disapprobation of reduction or one-sidedness, and his delight in world-making a dismay with destructiveness. The optimism of this book is heartening and helpful; but the issues the book raises would be addressed more deeply and clearly if Singer were willing to confront the problem of evil, and to reveal the sources of his own moral judgment, especially in the cases where it is negative.

In the penultimate chapter of *The Pursuit of Love*, Singer attacks Freud's pessimism in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where Freud argues that reason and passion finally cannot be harmonized. Building on the distinctions that he has urged in the preceding chapters, Singer focuses his critique on Freud's way of treating libido in mechanistic terms and of treating it as detachable from civilization. Contrasting civilization with libido, Freud severs the gratifications of lust and the renunciations of civility as if they could never be reconciled. Singer, by contrast, has tried to show how thoroughly culture permeates our sexuality, and how thoroughly saturated our culture is with love in all its varieties. Indeed, for Singer culture is the work of love.

All the same, the final chapter where Singer admonishes the reader to "Love, and Do as You Will" lacks the impact that a dose of Freudian or Augustinian pessimism might have given it. Philosophers in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

general are a cheery fellowship, especially in the modern West where Locke, Leibniz, Hume, and Kant set the philosophical tone. Thinkers who have really wrestled with the problem of evil are few and far between, but Augustine and Freud must be reckoned among them. If the epistemological task of the philosopher is to distinguish and then to integrate, and if the moral task of any human being is to integrate distinct sources of meaning and thereby to construct worlds, then why do we go wrong? Why do we so often fail to understand, and why do we so often ruin the beautiful worlds we construct? Why do we flee love as often as we pursue it? Poets and musicians have sung about these questions, but surely they also trouble the philosopher.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HAROLD FROMM

Cracked Thinking

ON THE JACKET of *Dogmatic Wisdom: How the Culture Wars Divert Education and Distract America*,[1] we see an oval medallion depicting the essence of Russell Jacoby's argument: opposite a classical pillar and situated on a geological fault sits Rodin's *Thinker*. A crack runs all the way up his massive hulk and right through his head. Behind him is another, smaller pillar with a dollar bill spread stiffly across its top. The poles of this book are thus starkly prefigured: liberal studies vs. the cash nexus will never be far from sight in the argument that develops. What the illustration is unable to represent, however, is the extent to which Jacoby remains the supple, flexible-minded, public intellectual, full of surprises as he negotiates the vagaries of social history.

Having written earlier books on Marxism, psychoanalysis, and "the last intellectuals" (i.e., the generation before academia became culture's self-authorized groundskeeper), Jacoby pursues an anomalous career as historian/social-critic/academic, holding ideologies to the sometimes high ideals that generated them and from which they invariably fall, to his continuing disappointment. As a leftist attacking the pretensions of the left as well as of the right (with whose values he often sympathizes), he has become hard to categorize, at times sounding—if the simile is not too oxymoronic—like a toned-down Camille Paglia. His reading, like hers, is extremely wide-ranging and his positions, again like hers, are those of a thinker at the periphery of academia. He is one of society's necessary gadflies.

Dogmatic Wisdom begins with an account of academia as infected with a "spreading mercantile ethos" of practical and professional studies, an academia that no longer believes in what used to be called knowledge for its own sake. Although Jacoby has an ongoing argument with Allan Bloom, he is largely in agreement with him about the decline of liberal studies and their supplantation by a cafeteria of elective courses geared to practical, professional, and political interests. But Jacoby finds that neither Bloom nor the neoconservatives in general go far enough, because their criticisms extend only to the mercantile quality of undergraduate education instead of focusing on the mercantile quality of American capitalist society as a whole. "Why

[1] DOGMATIC WISDOM: How the Culture Wars Divert Education and Distract America, by *Russell Jacoby*. Doubleday. $22.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

don't conservatives bring up the sharp jump in business majors and the general triumph of commercial education?" Jacoby asks. Instead, they attack the vapid and basically ineffectual stupidities of the radical left, an attack he endorses but nonetheless finds trifling. His global complaint is that rightist critics of higher education are obsessed with words and texts while ignoring the society that produces them. In other words, the lamented instrumentality of contemporary education is an unacknowledged expression of an illiberal, instrumental society in which all values are measured in dollars, despite high-sounding moralisms. One could even say that high-sounding moralisms defuse and take the place of the radical transformation of values that should be the real agenda, in the way that the practice of churchgoing can be a surrogate for the practice of virtue. Furthermore, the instrumentality of what used to be called the liberal arts is also nourished by the frenzied specialization, professionalism, and careerism of leftist academics themselves. In essence, Jacoby accepts Gerald Graff's account of the development of American universities as an accretion of specialties (as given in *Professing Literature*) but whereas Graff—in love with the destructive element of professionalism—thinks that turning the curriculum into a discussion of the academy's problems, obsessions, and conflicts will save the day, Jacoby is ready for a cleansing of the Augean stables that would reaffirm some of the Arnoldian "elitist" and anti-commercial values now in disfavor.

It is fascinating to see how Jacoby's consistency as a moralist has altered his political and cultural stances in the course of two or three decades of social criticism. As what could perhaps be called a Marxist-manqué, he years ago criticized European Marxism for its betrayal of high ideals as it spread throughout much of the West and succumbed to the vices of practical politics. Now he has subscribed to what some might regard as an Arnoldian defense of leisure for study and contemplation as well as knowledge for its own sake, again in the service of these selfsame high ideals. If earlier attacks on capitalism, by Jacoby and others, derived from their sense of capitalism's economic depression of the masses, the attacks today derive from capitalism's only too palpable success in mass bourgeoisification. The spreading malaise consists now of starving minds, not starving bodies. Through crass instrumental materialism, capitalism falls short of what is noble, good, and beautiful. Nor has Marxism done any better. Leftist academics have betrayed the revolution by turning into capitalists self-deluded by the high-falutin' *political words* of "theory," credulously perceiving themselves as socially reformative radicals, while neoconservatives, promulgating the intellectual and aesthetic values "deconstructed" by this politics-crazed left, are equally self-deluded in thinking their defense of the *aesthetic words* of the arts will somehow reinstate the genteel WASPy values of yesteryear even as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their own real lives are driven by the stock market and multinational corporations.

Jacoby is particularly exercised by the ways in which language has long been a substitute for moral action. He traces verbal political correctness back to the American eighteenth century and the spelling books of Noah Webster. Old as the practice of revisionist vocabulary may be, referring to domestic servants as "help" and to firing people as "letting them go," Jacoby objects that such language is mainly euphemistic, leaving in place the unsettling realities the words conceal, just like the bureaucratic terms invented to upgrade garbage collectors and store clerks. "Language gets better as society gets worse." But "shouldn't language bespeak the injustices of the world? Utopia has not yet arrived; should we pretend that it has? The new reformers seek to strip language of shadows, merging euphemisms and advertising. . . . They want language to radiate a positive world of egalitarian men and women, black and white, successful and progressing. Language turns opaque, however, if punished for the sins of a punishing world." Correct language deflects socially responsible action: saying "colored people" instead of "people of color" becomes a greater crime than acts of bigotry or short-sighted social policy.

Since the Free Speech movement of the sixties, a reversal of the roles has occurred: leftists are now the totalitarian repressives, while right wingers defend free speech. But although he relates a number of horror stories resulting from intolerance of speech at various universities, Jacoby does not think free speech is really threatened in the United States. Rather, "The free market allows almost everything; it also devalues everything. Serious writings must compete with pornography and slick television shows—and invariably lose out." Still, if Jacoby often sides with the ideals of the right, he is nonetheless suspicious of their motivations. Conservatives may now be the defenders of free speech, but once again it is a maneuver that focuses its energies on words while ignoring the political/economic inequities of the status quo, which leftists claim to be redressing through speech codes.

Jacoby has some novel things to say about these codes, besides the fact that they are mostly a feature of elite universities and almost unknown at community colleges. What he discovers is that the greatest activity in this area takes place at universities with law schools, where the construction of proscriptive rules provides legal scholars with mischievous busywork that is of dubious benefit to the world outside—or even inside—the campus gates.

> Even as the law professors dwell on issues of ethnic hate speech they barely seem to realize that we live in an authentically multicultural society—with multicultural hatred and insults. Hate and hate speech are egalitarian. These academics operate with a simple

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conception of a white majority affronting minorities, who regard each other with warmth and consideration.

Golden Age and Noble Savage romances seem to have supplanted the fantasies of Marxian professors about the proletariat, inciting the one-upmanships of victimology. But Jacoby's explorations in Los Angeles make it clear that hostility between blacks and Latinos is more vicious than that of either group toward whites. "If an African-American insults a Korean-American or a Chicano insults an African-American . . . which group feels worse?" This is not the realm of law, Jacoby remarks, "but of mystical comparative therapy."

Behind the "words that wound" mania lies the religion of self-esteem, a religion that Jacoby disparages and that is coming under increasing attack, with newspaper reports of schools whose crack-down on low standards for minorities has dramatically improved their performance. "Insecurity and self-doubts . . . stoke achievement and hard work," he believes, and the competitive nature of contemporary society, with its rapid shift in technologies, requires remedies other than linguistic redescriptions and self-esteem workshops. "In easing the pain, decorous talk may forget the disease."

What appears as a live and let live, easy-going tolerance and respect for relativity and diversity looks to Jacoby more like the intolerance of political correctness. On the one hand, Beethoven and Salt-N-Pepa are regarded as equal because so many students and faculty are too relativistic to believe that anything is better than anything else, while on the other hand passionate ideologies and identity politics dictate what can be said and done. The cultural pluralism that sounds so benign on first acquaintance finally demands that individuals behave according to the roles being assigned to the ethnic and sexual groups of which they are members. Although you can't any longer make the assumptions that blacks like jazz or women like homemaking or gays like promiscuity, other stereotypes have taken their places: a Hispanic mustn't be a Republican, a black musn't be a neoconservative, and a woman mustn't like men too much. It's not just Linda Chavez, Richard Rodriguez, Clarence Thomas, or Bruce Bawer who refuse to play the roles assigned to them—it's a lot of other people as well, from Camille Paglia, Katie Roiphe, and Christina Hoff Sommers to Glenn Loury, Shelby Steele, Orlando Patterson—and Russell Jacoby himself, with plenty of ordinary people in between. The question, according to Jacoby, is just what *is* a black, a woman, a Latino, etc.? If these are no longer believed to be essences, then what is "black behavior"? "Immigration, intermarriage, and cross-ethnic adoptions render ideas of multiculturalism hopelessly retrograde." In practice, unfashionable as the notion of a melting pot may be, American society continues to become increasingly homogeneous. Inconsistently, perhaps, the multicultural hatreds he spoke of earlier coexist with his belief that in daily practice cultural differences are less substantive than they are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

claimed to be. "Professional sports, Hollywood movies, automobiles, designer clothes, name-brand sneakers, television and videos, commercial music and CDs: these pervade America's multiculturalism. . . . The multiple cultures define themselves by their preferences within a consumer society, not by a rejection of it. Only rare exceptions, like the Amish, carve out a life beyond and against the structure of advanced capitalism." Jacoby sees the strident affirmation of identities as a mostly symbolic shoring up of fragments against their ruin, an insistence on what is less and less really there, on recognition of an identity that is being left behind. It is now mainly as voting blocs, he says, that the various cultures have any distinctive visibility, while the ineluctable values of American industrial society are imbedded "in their souls and wallets."

Meanwhile, for Jacoby the takeover of thought itself by affirmative action, which substitutes ethnic and sexual quotas for thinkers in place of the validity or truth of thoughts, is precipitating crises throughout the humanities. Corroborating this view, a recent issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reports a conflict in the American Historical Association between professors who defend social justice as their profession's chief goal and those who defend scholarship. This increasing confrontation and fragmentation, not only in the academy but in American society at large, may, as I see it, possibly be a good thing, because as the edifices of affluent Western civilization start to crumble from lack of community and from the insistence on increasingly more trivial personal vindications destructive of shared values, the pendulum is likely to swing in the other direction (the examples of Bosnia and Rwanda are frightening admonitions)—and indeed, there are plenty of signs that such a swing is beginning to take place as infighting among interest groups becomes more fierce. The ultimate splinter would be the isolated individual fighting for himself in a war of all against all.

After extended discussions of the injurious effects of commercial values and cultural identities on higher education, Jacoby rounds things off with a chapter on the damage done by academics. Here, he picks up where he left off in *The Last Intellectuals*, whose principal theme was the disappearance of the generalist reader and critic as casualties of the professionalization of thinking by the academy. "In the 'culture wars' little is more striking than the ease with which the new professors defend professional reputations and language, sophisticated theories and distinguished friends, heaping contempt on journalists and critics as backward outsiders." What these "new" professors particularly don't like is clear, lucid writing, which they regard as "repressive," a form of dominance by the established order. "Men of letters" and journalists are anathema because they try to reduce the unfathomable complexities of radical thought to what can be understood by intelligent nonspecialists, hence the obsolescence of mediators like Lionel Trilling and Edmund Wilson, two of Jacoby's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"last intellectuals." Although brilliant and lucid writers such as Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx are the masters from whom today's academic radicals have derived their most potent lessons, these francophied American disciples inhabit a different prose universe. "The pedantry, self-satisfaction, and academicism which the original critical theorists despised metastasizes in the disciples, where it threatens to become not simply a lesion but the whole of their work. In the name of subversion the new academics throttle language, confounding rigor mortis with rigor." One by one, Jacoby surveys the statements of leading "new" academics, only to find expressions of professionalism and entrepreneurialism. He is murderous on Jonathan Culler:

> Culler's survey of "Criticism and the American University" reads like a guide for the investor in the futures market of criticism. What schools or individuals look promising? Harvard has been in the "doldrums." Berkeley . . . a "major" force. "Duke . . . hiring a number of distinguished senior literary theorists, will provide an interesting test of the possibility of creating a new theoretically-orientated program that will have a decisive impact on literary studies." Investors take note. Instruct your broker to buy Duke critical theory futures.

Summarizing Culler's many prognostications about which theories and departments will hit pay dirt, Jacoby concludes, "Again, these statements are unexceptional—if made about the frozen pizza industry or a football franchise."

Amidst all the concerns of different groups—about moneymaking majors for prospective B.A.'s, multiculturalism, affirmative action, racism, free speech, and the careerist enterprises of academics—liberal education goes down the drain. It is tempting to describe this book as a leftist version of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, but it is now getting hard to place Jacoby in the political spectrum. It's as though he has washed his hands of both rightist and leftist crazies, seeing them hopelessly embroiled in their textual shibboleths while the society they are pretending to rescue simply falls apart from benign neglect. If Marx, for all his socially-oriented genius, has in the long run been mostly a failure, what salvation can be expected, say, from an academic like Stanley Fish, who represents only too well the entrepreneurial society that Jacoby laments?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DAVID DOOLEY

Poetic Integrity

IN STANCE, VISION, TECHNICAL MASTERY, range of subject matter, understanding of language, handling of tone, and knowledge of human beings two of the 25 books submitted for review this quarter, Jack Gilbert's *The Great Fires: Poems 1982–1992*[1] and Geoffrey Hill's *New & Collected Poems: 1952–1992*[2] reach heights and depths unimagined by some of the other authors. Though these poets differ greatly in style and subject matter, they show interesting similarities. Both are over sixty, yet each has published sparingly. Hill's collected poems is just over 200 pages long; *The Great Fires* is only Gilbert's third full-length book. Like T. S. Eliot, Elizabeth Bishop, and Philip Larkin, both Gilbert and Hill are good critics of their own work, not wishing to be represented in print by their lesser efforts. (Would that more poets could contemplate the notion that not every line they write is touched by genius!) Well-read, highly intelligent, and uncompromising, Gilbert and Hill demand much of their readers, but offer commensurate rewards.

Jack Gilbert's poems are usually short and compressed, with strong openings which plunge the reader directly into the poem: "The ship goes down and everybody is lost"; "He stands there baffled by pleasure and how little / it counts"; "He manages like somebody carrying a box / that is too heavy. . . ." His two most characteristic techniques are the use of sentence fragments and abrupt shifts of topic. Rather than using fragments and juxtapositions to portray a disjointed universe, as Eliot does, Gilbert uses them to build new syntheses the rest of us have not had the wit or the experience to recognize. The juxtapositions seem less willful, less surreal, and more inevitable on every re-reading. The one authentic twentieth-century American successor to the Metaphysical poets, he likes to investigate one kind of experience by considering it together with an entirely different kind of experience. For example, in "Sonatina" he writes about American innocence from the perspective of island spirits amazed by the wonderful smell of American soldiers.

If Gilbert sometimes seems quirky and eccentric in the angles of attack he chooses, almost all of his poems ultimately deal with the

[1] THE GREAT FIRES: Poems 1982–1992, by *Jack Gilbert*. Alfred A. Knopf. $20.00.
[2] NEW & COLLECTED POEMS 1952–1992, by *Geoffrey Hill*. Houghton Mifflin Co. $29.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

commonest of themes: grief, loss, aging, the power of eros, delight in the physical world, and the absolute particularity of people and things. By choice the author has spent years of his life living in poverty in foreign countries. However, although he may have to scrape "burned soup from [his] only pan" at midnight to cook mackerel before it spoils, he doesn't play the misunderstood artist. On the contrary, he lives as he does because he is "Not stubborn, just greedy." He may be "Old and alone," but this happy Promethean is also "Full of what abundance has done to his spirit."

The Great Fires moves back and forth between decades, dwellings, countries, continents, wives, lovers. For instance, instead of gathering all the poems about the death of his Japanese wife in one section, Gilbert scatters them through the book, just as the memory of the poet must periodically return to such an overwhelming event. Readers must rediscover their bearings with each new poem, a challenge which becomes exhilarating. One objection to the arrangement: the song quoted in the weak final poem has a greater poignancy for the author than for the reader. Any of the preceding three poems would have provided a stronger conclusion.

For the newcomer to Gilbert I particularly recommend ten poems which, taken together, give a fair idea of his work: "Michiko Dead" and "Married," which offer stunning metaphors for grief; "Dante Dancing," which can take its place with the great love poems in English; "Sonatina" and "Alternatives," which explore interactions between widely divergent cultures; "Going Wrong" and "The Lives of Famous Men," two of the best poems about the way Gilbert has lived; "Recovering Amid the Farms," one of the best character vignettes; and "Voices Inside and Out" and "Adulterated," which admirably show how Gilbert thinks by metaphor. The importance of context in Gilbert makes excerpting difficult, but here are three representative passages:

> The monks petition to live the harder way,
> in pits dug farther up the mountain,
> but only the favored ones are permitted
> that scraped life. The syrup-water and cakes
> the abbot served me were far too sweet.
> A simple misunderstanding of pleasure
> because of inexperience.
>
> "On Stone"

> . . . The women at Dachau knew they were about
> to be gassed when they pushed back the Nazi guard
> who wanted to die with them, saying he must live.
> And sang for a little while after the doors closed.
>
> "Adulterated"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> He is thinking of the Danish cold that forced him
> into the gypsy girl's bed. Like walking through
> a door and finding Venezia when he thought he was
> in Yugoslavia.
>
> "Hot Nights in Florida"

This last metaphor is not only witty but exact, since someone arriving in Venice by train will literally open the door of the nondescript station and find a Venetian canal on the other side. Jack Gilbert's imagery is almost always this precise.

Gilbert's career, as distinct from his poetry, has been a strange mixture of recognition after each of his previous two books was published—*Views of Jeopardy* (1962) was the Yale Younger Poets selection; *Monolithos, Poems 1962 and 1982* was a nominee for the Pulitzer Prize—and subsequent obscurity when no immediate follow-up volumes appeared. No other book of poems published by an American in the 1980s holds up as well on repeated re-reading as *Monolithos*. *The Great Fires*, a more accessible book than *Monolithos*, may finally establish Gilbert securely as the major poet he is.

Unlike Gilbert, the late William Stafford published prolifically, which would ordinarily make the appearance of a selected poems most welcome. Robert Bly has chosen and arranged Stafford's poems under the flowery title *The Darkness Around Us Is Deep*.[3] The book is less than 140 pages long, a sensible limit, especially given Stafford's lack of range. Other editorial decisions are less defensible. Instead of following Stafford's work from book to book, Bly has grouped the poems in six thematic categories. Bly gives no indication of which poem comes from which book and does not even list the titles of Stafford's eight full-length books of verse. The table of contents prints Bly's section headings but not the names of Stafford's poems. The book designer has also made an unfortunate choice: though Stafford does not use long lines, the typeface is so large that one or more words are often left dangling on another line. The publication of this book makes it unlikely that an adequately presented selection of Stafford's verse will appear in the near future.

One of the most revealing of Stafford's poems, as well as one of the best, is "Our Kind," which begins:

> Our mother knew our worth—
> not much. To her, success
> was not being noticed at all.

Although our country's leaders may tell us to "Be proud," over their shoulders are "God and / our mother, signaling: 'Ridiculous.' "

[3] THE DARKNESS AROUND US IS DEEP: Selected Poems of William Stafford, by *William Stafford*. Ed. by *Robert Bly*. HarperPerennial. $12.00p.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stafford's attitude toward poetry seems to have been shaped in large part by the psychologically introjected persona of his belittling mother. Poems like "Our Kind," "First Grade," "An Archival Print," "Consolations," "Traveling Through the Dark," and "Clash" show that Stafford was at least intermittently able to overcome this destructive force. The most moving line of the collection (there are not very many) is "I carried wood, never touching anyone." Stafford reaches deepest within himself and most fully portrays moral complexity in "Clash," which explores the moral growth involved in choosing not to use violence against his mother.

Stafford was famous for writing a poem every day. When asked what he did if he wasn't writing well, he replied, "Well, then I just lower my standards." Bly quotes this approvingly in the introduction. Maintain high standards? Ridiculous, says Mother. Wait for "inspiration"? Even more ridiculous. Asserting that one is more interested in the process of writing than in the finished product is one way of deflecting Mother's probable scorn at the individual poem. Stafford seems willing to strike easy poses about mountain climbers who "leave their names at the top in a jar" or about "the great old USA" or to approve a metaphor as mixed-up as "I still try, / send my sight like a million pickpockets / up rich people's drives," confusing pickpockets with burglars and asserting an unearned superiority to the rich. The audience, too, is encouraged to lower its standards. Writing a poem a day shows an industry even Mother might grudgingly have to approve, but it can also be an evasion from the necessary examination of one's poetry and the poetry of others, of oneself and of other people.

Fecund as he was, Stafford only published eight full-length books of poetry; *And the Stars Were Shining*[4] is John Ashbery's sixteenth collection. Jack Gilbert has published three books in over thirty years; Ashbery has published three books in the last four years. By now some critics have invested heavily in Ashbery's reputation. Curiously, Ashbery's admirers agree about the importance of his work, but not about whether the poems are supposed to make sense. My own view is that most of the poems are not supposed to make discursive sense, but that most of the poems I like at least conduct negotiations with discursive meaning. *And the Stars Were Shining* offers no new departures for Ashbery and will not likely convert any of his detractors.

The new book seems lighter in tone and more surreal than Ashbery's best work from the 1970s. Poem titles rarely have much to do with anything that goes on in the poem. Comparing Ashbery with Gilbert, one notices how many stratagems Ashbery has for avoiding emotion. Remarkably, one can read a great deal of Ashbery criticism without discovering references to camp. Too little has been written

[4] AND THE STARS WERE SHINING, by *John Ashbery*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $18.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A SELECT **HUDSON REVIEW** PUBLICATION

Poems by Ghalib

translated by
AIJAZ AHMAD
with
WILLIAM STAFFORD
and
ADRIENNE RICH
forenote by
AIJAZ AHMAD

This vintage **Hudson Review** publication of 20 ghazals by renowned Urdu poet Ghalib marked the Ghalib Centennial Year, 1969–70. This book of noted translations by William Stafford and Adrienne Rich is available in its original edition for $2. ORDER NOW!

ADDRESS ORDERS TO:
The Hudson Review, *684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about the social milieu of Ashbery's poetry, a literary and artistic world in which campiness and put-ons were favored and the expression of strong emotion was not. Ashbery is good at catching intonations of types of writing and speech, e.g., "And you know, the skunk family approved it too, including old Grandpa skunk" or "Yes! And the cake was square! / How did you guess?" "The Mandrill on the Turnpike" is fun to read aloud, complete with accents.

One of Ashbery's admirers is quoted on the book jacket as calling *And the Stars Were Shining* one of Ashbery's strongest collections and the title poem "his most beautiful long poem yet." Here is the first stanza of the last section of the title poem:

> You get hungry,
> you eat hot.
> Home's a cold delivery destination.
> The emphatic nose puts it on hold.
> Clubs are full.
> I kind of like the all-night dust-up
> though I'm sworn to secrecy,
> with or without a cat.

Is this passage strong and/or beautiful, or is it, like much of the volume, inert self-imitation? The best verdict on the book may come from Ashbery himself in "Till the Bus Starts": "It seems strange I read this page before, no, / this whole short story."

Considerably more interesting than the new Ashbery is Alane Rollings' *The Struggle to Adore*.[5] Most of Rollings' flowing long-lined poems make witty observations about male/female relationships. Whereas most poets today, good, bad, and indifferent, focus on particulars, Rollings prefers to generalize about common experiences. This approach quickly exposes unwonted pretensions to knowledge. Rollings demonstrates that she does understand the subjects she writes about. Here she discusses a woman who is having an affair with a married man:

> . . . he guards his wants
> like strengths not to be revealed too soon. Your needs
> are disguised as vague curiosity; your air of knowingness
> comes from your carefulness not to ask too much.

The perceptions are unexpected and convincing, the presentation delightful. Rollings characteristically finds new ways to describe the familiar. A lasting relationship is "our long pilgrimage of talk." When an affair ends, she observes, "All I'd ever misunderstood was torn

[5] THE STRUGGLE TO ADORE, by *Alane Rollings*. Story Line Press. $12.95p.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from me." On another occasion she wryly notes that "The goodness I wasn't sure I had was all I had."

Individual poems sometimes blend together. Ordinarily that would indicate a serious fault, but with Rollings the sum of the parts seems greater than the whole. She could profitably focus each poem more sharply without losing the expansive flow which is one of the book's attractive features. Her poem about a homeless woman falls into mere cuteness in the manner of Stephen Dunn, but elsewhere her wry humor, intelligent empathy, and sophisticated sense of play freshly illuminate present-day romances. "Can anyone live on exultation?" she asks, promptly answering, "Can anyone live / any other way?"

If Alane Rollings will be a new name to many readers, more will know of Edward Hirsch. His first book, *For the Sleepwalkers* (1981), contained talented apprentice work in a variety of styles. With *Wild Gratitude* (1986), overall a weaker book, Hirsch pledged allegiance to the mainstream style from which he has not departed. *The Night Parade* (1989) was a big step forward, especially in the fine long poem about the bubonic plague, "And Who Will Look Upon Our Testimony." Unfortunately, nothing in his new book, *Earthly Measures*,[6] operates at the level of that poem. *Earthly Measures* confirms that thus far Hirsch's talent is for historical poems, poems which make use of pre-existing source material. Some of the best poems in *Earthly Measures* are the ones about Henry James, Simone Weil, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. "Unearthly Voices," which depicts Hofmannsthal's encounters in Greece with Christianity and the ancient Greek religions, is perhaps the strongest poem in the book (cutting the last four lines would make it stronger still). Hirsch deals less successfully with the lyric and the personal subject. None of the personal poems here works as well as "Family Stories" in *The Night Parade*.

Hirsch's greatest asset is his sense of rhythm. His ability to unify a poem rhythmically is still in advance of his sense of structure, and his sense of structure is far in advance of his sense of metaphor. Hirsch relies on two particularly feeble structural devices: first, repeating "I thought of" to keep a poem going; and second, beginning a poem flatly as a guarantee of sincerity (e.g., "How long has it taken me to recall / That cold and radiant afternoon / in late October, 1959" and "I'll never forget that morning when my mother-in-law / floated in a netherworld of morphine-induced sleep"). Such threadbare devices weaken any poem.

Banal imagery, however, is Hirsch's undoing. He uses personification as unthinkingly as any three-named poet of 1900. A "dark lake" has "sheer skin." The night has "skin." Ponds have "watery skin." The Aegean has "thunderous shoulders." A clock "tolls like a heartbeat." A factory has "ruined breath." Hirsch uses phrases as trite as "the

[6] EARTHLY MEASURES, by *Edward Hirsch*. Alfred A. Knopf. $20.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

banked fires of adolescence," "the vacancy of space," and "scattered like thoughts." Moths "seemed to want the flames so terribly." When not banal, his imagery can be forced: "the city slumps like a widow"; "the rough-hewn experiential / Pool of the world itself"; "Every now and then a lark flew up / like a wild baton / or a reminder of something." The root of the problem is that Hirsch, like many of his contemporaries, regards metaphor as a necessary but irrelevant decoration. He could improve his work considerably if during revision he paused to question each of his metaphors.

One can scarcely imagine Geoffrey Hill writing metaphors as careless as the ones quoted above. Most critics today would name Hill as one of the best living English poets. Even those not particularly drawn to his work would grant him talent, technical skill, ambition, and high seriousness. The new poems in his *New & Collected Poems: 1952–1992* are generally the weakest, especially the short-lined poems like "Ritornelli" and "Churchill's Funeral." The fine new poem "Sorrel" is in iambic pentameter, which seems to suit Hill's abilities much better. New poems in a "new and selected" or "new and collected" volume rarely undergo much selection. Hill's collected poems, on the other hand, are a substantial achievement.

Like Allen Tate and others of the New Critics, Hill writes a poetry of tension and irony, prickly intellection and verbal ambiguity, modernist difficulty and iambic meter, with a fondness (ultimately derived from Hopkins) for unusual verbs of action (thus "thrums," "tamp," "raddle," and "root" within seven lines) and for melodramatic savagery (e.g., "a meaty conduit of blood," "flesh leaked rennet over them," "gobbets of the sweetest sacrifice"). Hill and the young Robert Lowell use this period style more successfully than any other poets. Although this kind of diction often works in context, it does not accumulate particularly well. Hill's recurring subjects—war, human cruelty, poetry, a Christian view of history, and the failure of erotic love—would have been congenial to the New Critics, as would his dark view of human nature. From the early "Annunciations" through the long poem on the French poet Charles Péguy, poetry itself is seen as both equivocal and equivocating, more likely to proceed from bad faith than to provide a haven from a dangerous world.

One of the best ways into Hill's work is through "The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz," a sequence of brief lyrics by an imaginary Spanish poet who has lost the woman he loves. He remembers "your hand running over me / Deft as a lizard, like a sinew of water." His art offers little solace: "Old petulant / Sorrow comes back to us, metamorphosed / And semi-precious. Fortuitous amber. / As though this recompensed our deprivation." Finally the lover/poet is left to "enjoy abstinence in a vocation / Of now-almost-meaningless despair."

The English poet Jon Silkin has noted parallels between the "Songbook" and Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. Similarly, the influence of Pound's *Cantos* can be found in Hill's *Mercian Hymns*, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sequence of 30 brief prose "canticles," as Hill calls them, in which contemporary England exists simultaneously with the time of Offa, an Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia. Each canticle may be regarded as a crystalline miniature *Canto*. Hill adroitly combines a high style based on the *Cantos* ("Hemlock in ambush, night-soil, tetanus," "barbaric ivy, scrollwork of fern," "Thrall to their freedom, I dug and hoarded. Orchards fruited above clefts") with a middle style based on Auden (see, for example, hymn III and the second paragraph of XVII). If the *Mercian Hymns* are difficult to grasp as a unit, details are often fascinating.

Hill, like Jack Gilbert, is a poet of severity, as Gilbert conceives of the term. In "Foraging for Wood on the Mountain," Gilbert writes of "a place where differences are clear. / Between the mind's severity and its harshness." For the poet who has energy and talent, the mind's severity is both necessary and life-giving. Few poets in the last thirty years have exercised self-criticism as faithfully as Gilbert and Hill, and the differences are indeed clear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

"The Castle of Indolence" will be the title essay of a collection of THOMAS M. DISCH's poetry criticism to be published by St. Martin's Press in the fall of 1995. In addition, *The Priest: A Gothic Romance* will be out from Knopf this spring. . . . LOUIS SIMPSON's most recent books are a collection of "essays and notes on poetry," *Ships Going into the Blue* (University of Michigan Press), and *The King My Father's Wreck* (Story Line Press), a book of memoirs several of which first appeared in *The Hudson Review*. . . . ALAN JACOBS* is Associate Professor of English at Wheaton College in Illinois. He wishes to thank the Pew Charitable Trusts for a grant which enabled him to spend a year working on a book about W.H. Auden. . . . DAVID MASON's prize-winning narrative poem, "The Country I Remember," is scheduled for publication in the Summer 1995 issue of *The Hudson Review*. . . . MILLER WILLIAMS* is the author, editor, or translator of twenty-six books, including eight volumes of poetry. The poems included here are from *Points of Departure*, to be published soon by the University of Illinois Press. . . . WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD's *Playing It by Ear: Literary Essays and Reviews* has just been brought out by the University of Massachusetts Press. . . . JAMES LAUGHLIN* is the founder and publisher of New Directions. His *Collected Poems* were recently published by Moyer Bell. . . . PATRICIA GOEDICKE's next book, *Invisible Horses*, is scheduled for publication by Milkweed Editions.

ROBERT HILL LONG had a *terrible* season with the Brownsville (Oregon) Dodgers (Men's Senior League Baseball, coached by *HR* contributor Robert McDowell). . . . HELEN CONKLING* lives in Dewittville, New York. Her poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner* and other magazines. . . . FLOYD SKLOOT's* full-length book of poems, *Music Appreciation*, has recently been published by the University Press of Florida. . . . JOHN LOUGHERY's biography of the American painter John Sloan is due from Henry Holt & Co. in May. . . . CARL PFLUGER is writing a book exploring some of the religious and philosophical dimensions of environmentalism and related movements. . . . MARK JARMAN's next contribution to *The Hudson Review* will be a review of *Dreaming and Storytelling* by Bert O. States. . . . THOMAS FILBIN's reviews have appeared in *The Hudson Review*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and *The Boston Gobe*. He lives in Massachusetts. . . . GARY KRIST's most recent book is *Bone by Bone* (Harcourt Brace), a collection of stories. . . . EMILY GROSHOLZ recently read her poetry as part of the International Writers Center Reading Series at Washington University, St. Louis. . . . HAROLD FROMM's next piece for *The Hudson Review* will be an article on the writings of Camille Paglia. . . . DAVID DOOLEY's second book of poems, *The Revenge by Love*, is to be published by Story Line Press.

**Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Selected Back Issues of The Hudson Review

ANNIVERSARY ISSUES:

30th, SPRING 1978 Robert Martin Adams on Modernism, Robert Pinsky, David Ignatow, Guy Davenport, Denis Donoghue, Linda Pastan, Philip Dacey, Patricia Meyer Spacks. $15.00.

35th, SPRING 1983 A. R. Ammons, Davenport, Dana Gioia on Business and Poetry, Louis Simpson, Roger Rosenblatt, Charles Tomlinson, Joseph Epstein. $15.00.

40th, SPRING 1988 Robert McDowell's narrative poem "The Fifties," Frederick Brown's "Zola and Manet," Simpson, William H. Pritchard, Donald Hall, Alice Bloom. $15.00.

***SPECIAL ISSUE: Poetry and Ecology, Autumn 1970** Berry, Ammons, Snyder and Stafford. $25.00.

THE 80S:

WINTER 1980–81 Berry "Standing by Words"/Pritchard "Blackmur's Last Song"/Gioia/V. S. Naipaul/Fainlight. $6.00.

SPRING 1981 Gerald Early "Hot Spicks Versus Cool Spades"/Tomlinson/ Philip Levine/Joyce Carol Oates. $6.00.

AUTUMN 1981 Gilberto Perez on Buster Keaton/Gioia/Ostriker. $6.00.

WINTER 1981–82 Mudrick "Voltaire and His Biographers"/Simpson "Realists"/Akhmatova/Pasternak. $6.00.

SPRING 1982 Spacks "In Praise of Gossip"/Laurence Lieberman/Epstein/ Emily Grosholz. $6.00.

SUMMER 1982 Oates "Notes on Failure"/Alfred Corn "Time to Read Proust"/Derek Mahon/Andrew Hudgins/Gioia/Booth. $6.00.

AUTUMN 1982 Cushing Strout "James's Lady and Wharton's Age"/Stafford/Simpson. $6.00.

AUTUMN 1983 John Finlay "Flaubert in Egypt"/McDowell/Derwent May. $6.00.

WINTER 1983–84 Early "Prizefighting in America"/Dean Flower on James Merrill/Wendy Lesser on Hardwick/the Hamptons. $6.00.

SUMMER 1984 Lesser "George Gissing's Odd Women"/Eric A. Havelock "The Double Vision of Greek Tragedy"/Marcia B. Siegel on Peter Martins and Twyla Tharp. $6.00.

***LIMITED NUMBER OF VINTAGE THR'S AVAILABLE**

Please inquire for prices.

WINTER 1965–66 Interview with Anne Sexton.

WINTER 1961–62 Robert Lowell's essay on William Carlos Williams, poems by Williams.

ADDRESS ORDERS TO:

The Hudson Review, *684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Being Elsewhere

by John P. Sisk

Sisk's erudite, discursive "journeys" cover war and its generals, society and its celebrities, love and fear, hope and acceptance. A literary interlude with Sisk is an eclectic humanist's journey towards an understanding of our history.

$25.00 - hardcover
$12.50 - paperback

Eastern Washington
University Press-MS-14
526 5th Street
Cheney,WA 99004-2431
(509)359-7083

Coming in the Spring 1995 issue of The Hudson Review:

JOSEPH EPSTEIN
Elizabeth Bishop

BRUCE BAWER
Violated by Ideas

CARL PFLUGER
On Human Sacrifice

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Publication Title	2. Publication No.	3. Filing Date
The Hudson Review	2 5 3 6 4 0	26 September 1994
4. Issue Frequency	5. No. of Issues Published Annually	6. Annual Subscription Price
Quarterly	4	$24.00

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Street, City, County, State, and ZIP+4) (Not Printer)

684 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not Printer)

The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do Not Leave Blank)

Publisher (Name and Complete Mailing Address)

The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021

Editor (Name and Complete Mailing Address)

Paula Deitz and Frederick Morgan, 684 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021

Managing Editor (Name and Complete Mailing Address)

Ronald Koury, 684 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021

10. Owner (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereafter the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address as well as that of each individual must be given. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, its name and address must be stated.) (Do Not Leave Blank.)

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021, is a New York membership corporation not authorized to issue stock whose members are: Paula Deitz, John N. Loomis, Vincent H. Macchia, Frederick Morgan, George Parker, Jr., Charles K. Warner, all at above address.	

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check here. ☒ None

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address

12. For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at special rates. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes: (Check one)

☒ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
☐ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months
(If changed, publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

PS Form 3526, October 1994 (See instructions on Reverse)

13. Publication Name	14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below
The Hudson Review	20 June 1994

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	4900	4900
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales (Not Mailed)	2625	2600
(2) Paid or Requested Mail Subscriptions (Include Advertisers' Proof Copies/Exchange Copies)	2105	2047
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 15b(1) and 15b(2))	4730	4647
d. Free Distribution by Mail (Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free)	85	90
e. Free Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or Other Means)	0	0
f. Total Free Distribution (Sum of 15d and 15e)	85	90
g. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15f)	4815	4737
h. Copies Not Distributed (1) Office Use, Leftovers, Spoiled	85	163
(2) Return from News Agents	0	0
i. Total (Sum of 15g, 15h(1), and 15h(2))	4900	4900
Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (15c / 15g x 100)	98.23	98.10

16. This Statement of Ownership will be printed in the Winter 1995 issue of this publication. ☐ Check box if not required to publish.

17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner — Paula Deitz, Editor — Date: September 28, 1994.

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including multiple damages and civil penalties).

Instructions to Publishers

1. Complete and file one copy of this form with your postmaster on or before October 1, annually. Keep a copy of the completed form for your records.
2. Include in items 10 and 11, in cases where the stockholder or security holder is a trustee, the name of the person or corporation for whom the trustee is acting. Also include the names and addresses of individuals who are stockholders who own or hold 1 percent or more of the total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities of the publishing corporation. In item 11, if none, check box. Use blank sheets if more space is required.
3. Be sure to furnish all information called for in item 15, regarding circulation. Free circulation must be shown in items 15d, e, and f.
4. If the publication had second-class authorization as a general or requester publication, this Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation must be published; it must be printed in any issue in October or the first printed issue after October. If the publication is not published during October.
5. In item 16, indicate date of the issue in which this Statement of Ownership will be printed.
6. Item 17 must be signed.

Failure to file or publish a statement of ownership may lead to suspension of second-class authorization.

PS Form 3526, October 1994 (Reverse)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUME XLVII

AUTHORS

Albarelli, Dean: Passengers (*story*) . . . 193
Balée, Susan: Unconventional Victorian (*review*) 307
Flannery O'Connor Resurrected . . 377
Bogin, Nina: Inside the Chimney; Yugoslavia in Ruins; Halabja; March 1992 (*poems*) 255
Cardullo, Bert: Men at Work 101
Rubies in Paradise 437
The Servant 616
Carruth, Hayden: Fragments of a Memoir 345
Clark, Robert S.: Music Chronicle . . 449
Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood 636
Conkling, Helen: The Oboe Teacher; The Soul of a Dead Bat (*poems*) 605
Cotter, James Finn: Poetry Preserves (*review*) 313
Cox, Brian: Lindow Man at Manchester Museum; Left-Eye Cataract (*poems*) 24
Davis, Alan: Unseen Guests (*review*) . 141
Davis, Courtney: The Body Flute; The Barking Dog (*poems*) 49
Disch, Thomas M.: The Man Who Read a Book (*story*) 11
The Castle of Indolence 521
Dooley, David: In the Interest of Society (*review*) 117
Poetic Integrity (*review*) 673
Douglas, Lawrence: E-Mail (*story*) . . . 361
Epstein, Joseph: Bye-Bye, Bunny . . . 235
Farnsworth, Robert: Eminent Domain (*poem*) 427
Filbin, Thomas: Joseph Epstein's Pantheon (*review*) 123
Making a Scene (*review*) 648
Finlay, John: The Night of Alcibiades 57
Fisk, Josiah: The New Simplicity: The Music of Górecki, Tavener and Pärt 394
Flower, Dean: Impersonations (*review*) 495
Fromm, Harold: Himmelfarb, Mill, and the Dodges of Liberty (*review*). 503
Cracked Thinking (*review*) 667
Goedicke, Patricia: Stream (*poem*) . . . 85
Hero (*poem*) 599
Gregor, Arthur: Mozart in Chatillon; Memory Fragments (*poems*) 220
Grosholz, Emily: Love and the Creation of Value (*review*) 661
Gwynn, R.S.: Labors of Love (*review*) 483
Haines, John: Somewhat Less Than Holy (*review*) 490
Hart, Carol: Growing Up German . . 269
Hart, Henry: The Tree Ladder (*poem*) 87
Hazo, Samuel: For Bill (*poem*) 81
Hoey, Allen: Up Before Dawn; Suppose (*poems*) 83
Hoffman, Daniel: Bob; Blizzard (*poems*) 417
Hornby, Richard: Albee and Pinter . 109
New Plays in Louisville 277
Remembering Joe Papp: "A Whim of Iron" 429
The Guthrie Theater 609
Inez, Colette: Basho Takes an Upland Journey to Visit Poets in the North; Hard Muse (*poems*) 420
Jacobs, Alan: Auden's Local Culture. 543
Jarman, Mark: Nine Unholy Sonnets (*poems*) 413
Memory's Household (*review*) 331
Shifting Sands: *The Columbia History of American Poetry* (*review*) . . . 641
Krist, Gary: Bad Art, Good Entertainment (*review*) 299
A Thunder of Hooves in the Drawing Room (*review*) 655
Kumin, Maxine: In Praise of the New Transfer Station (*poem*) 423
Lally, Margaret: Song on the River Seine; Ceremony at Saks (*poems*) . 46
Larbaud, Valery: These Sounds and This Movement, trans. by Louis Simpson (*poems*) 533
Laughlin, James: The Search; De Contemptu Mortis (*poems*) 597
Lewis, Tess: Undone by Doubt (*review*) 149
Sparks of Virgil's Flame (*review*) . . 323
Long, Robert Hill: The River Kept From Us; The Horizon Pain Opens; Burn This (*poems*) 53
Diaspora (*poem*) 602

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Loughery, John: Representative Men. 94
Reality Check 284
Uncharted Paths 453
The Great Dare 623
McDonnell, Lynda: Veblen and the Mall of America 182
McDowell, Robert: Poetry Chronicle (*review*) 154
Mason, David: West Indian Discoveries (*review*) 163
The Escape; The Summer of Love; No One Had Told Us (*poems*) . . 249
Auden Onstage 543
Mysko, Madeleine: Out of Blue (*poem*) 80
Nims, John Frederick: Love's Progress; Strange! (*poems*) 425
Pfluger, Carl: The Views and Visions of Thomas Cole 629
Pritchard, William H.: James on Tour 259
That Shakespeherian Rag (*review*). 467
Naipaul's Written World 587
Rudikoff, Sonya: A Marriage in the Thirties and Forties (*review*) 127
Schultz, Robert: Five Kinds of Desire (*review*) 474
Siegel, Marcia B.: Ancestral Passages . 89
Giving Evolution a Nudge 445
Simpson, Louis: The Iverson Boy (*poem*) 27
Waterloo, the Story of an Obsession 227
Simpson, Louis, trans.: These Sounds and This Movement, by Valery Larbaud (*poems*) 533
Skloot, Floyd: Sourwood Nocturne (*poem*) 608
Spears, Monroe K.: Cosmology and the Writer 29
Tomlinson, Charles: For a Granddaughter; To My Daughter; Transaction at Mallards Pike; Autumn; On the Late Plane (*poems*) . 213
Tuttleton, James W.: Jack London in His Short Stories (*review*) 291
Wilhelmus, Tom: Contingency (*review*) 133
Wilkin, Karen: Caro at Seventy: An Overview 459
Williams, Norman: Games in the Darkening Air (*poem*) 422
Williams, Miller: Lay of the Badde Wyf; Clutter of Silence (Invention for Two Voices); A Tenth Anniversary Photograph, 1952; Living Will; On the Sacrifice of a Siamese Twin at Birth (*poems*) 582

BOOKS REVIEWED

(*Listed by Author*)

Ammons, A.R.: *Garbage* (James Finn Cotter) 313
Ashbery, John: *And the Stars Were Shining* (David Dooley) 673
Auden, W.H. and Christopher Isherwood: *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Plays and Other Dramatic Writings, 1928–1938*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (David Mason) . . 569
Auden, W.H. and Chester Kallman: *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Libretti and Other Dramatic Writings, 1939-1973* (David Mason) 569
Bawer, Bruce: *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* (David Dooley) 117
Coast to Coast (James Finn Cotter). 313
Bell, Madison Smartt: *Save Me, Joe Louis* (Alan Davis) 141
Belletto, René: *Machine*, trans. by Lanie Goodman (Gary Krist) 299
Brookner, Anita: *Dolly* (Dean Flower). 495
Brown, John Gregory: *Decorations in a Ruined Cemetery* (Dean Flower) . . 495
Buckley, Christopher: *Dark Matter* (James Finn Cotter) 313
Canin, Ethan: *The Palace Thief* (Dean Flower) 495
Carroll, James: *The City Below* (Thomas Filbin) 648
Chamberlin, J. Edward: *Come Back to Me My Language* (David Mason) 163
de Chellis Hill, Carol: *Henry James' Midnight Song* (Alan Davis) 141
Dickey, James: *To the White Sea* (Tom Wilhelmus) 133
Dobyns, Stephen: *The Wrestler's Cruel Study* (Tom Wilhelmus) 133
Epstein, Joseph: *Pertinent Players: Essays on the Literary Life* (Thomas Filbin) 123
Ferry, David: *Dwelling Places* (Robert McDowell) 154

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gilgamesh: A New Rendering in English Verse (Robert McDowell). 154
Flanagan, Thomas: *The End of the Hunt* (Thomas Filbin). 648
Gilbert, Jack: *The Great Fires: Poems 1982-1992* (David Dooley). 673
Goedicke, Patricia: *Paul Bunyan's Bearskin* (James Finn Cotter) 313
Gordon, Mary: *The Rest of Life* (Tom Wilhelmus) 133
Haines, John: *The Owl in the Mask of the Dreamer: Collected Poems* (James Finn Cotter) 313
Hall, Donald: *Life Work* (R.S. Gwynn) 483
The Museum of Clear Ideas (R.S. Gwynn) 483
Haskins, Lola: *Hunger* (Robert Schultz) 474
Hawkes, John: *Sweet William* (Tom Wilhelmus) 133
Hellenga, Robert: *The Sixteen Pleasures* (Thomas Filbin). 648
Hill, Geoffrey: *New & Collected Poems: 1952-1992* (David Dooley). 673
Himmelfarb, Gertrude: *On Looking into the Abyss: Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Society* (Harold Fromm) 503
Hirsch, Edward: *Earthly Measures* (David Dooley). 673
Holloway, John: *Civitatula: The Little City* (James Finn Cotter). 313
Inez, Colette: *Getting Underway: New and Selected Poems* (Robert Schultz). 474
Isherwood, Christopher and W.H. Auden: *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Plays and Other Dramatic Writings, 1928–1938,* ed. by Edward Mendelson (David Mason) . . 569
Jacoby, Russell: *Dogmatic Wisdom: How the Culture Wars Divert Education and Distract America* (Harold Fromm) 667
James, Henry: *Collected Travel Writings: The Continent,* ed. by Richard Howard; *Collected Travel Writings: Great Britain and America,* ed. by Richard Howard (William H. Pritchard). 259
Kallman, Chester and W.H. Auden: *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Libretti and Other Dramatic Writings, 1939-1973* (David Mason) 569
Keeley, Edmund: *School for Pagan Lovers* (Alan Davis) 141
Kennedy, Raymond: *The Bitterest Age* (Thomas Filbin). 648
Levine, Mark: *Debt* (Robert McDowell). 154
Levine, Philip: *The Bread of Time: Toward an Autobiography* (John Haines) 490
Lieberman, Laurence: *New and Selected Poems, 1962-92* (James Finn Cotter) 313
London, Jack: *The Complete Short Stories of Jack London,* ed. by Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz III, and I. Milo Shepard (James W. Tuttleton). 291
Lyons, Daniel: *The Last Good Man* (Gary Krist). 299
McConkey, James: *Stories from My Life with the Other Animals* (Mark Jarman) 331
McMahon, Lynne: *Devolution of the Nude* (Robert McDowell) 154
McManus, James: *Great America* (Robert McDowell) 154
Mann, Thomas: *Buddenbrooks,* trans. by John E. Woods (Tess Lewis). . . 149
Mason, Bobbie Ann: *Feather Crowns* (Alan Davis) 141
Millhauser, Steven: *Little Kingdoms* (Alan Davis) 141
Morgan, Elizabeth Seydel: *The Governor of Desire* (Robert Schultz) 474
Moss, Thylias: *Small Congregations: New and Selected Poems* (Robert McDowell). 154
Murdoch, Iris: *The Green Knight* (Dean Flower) 495
Naipaul, V.S.: *A Way in the World* (William H. Pritchard) 587
O'Brian, Patrick: *The Wine-Dark Sea* (Gary Krist). 299
Pack, Robert: *Fathering the Map: New and Selected Later Poems* (James Finn Cotter) 313
Parini, Jay, ed.: *The Columbia History of American Poetry* (Mark Jarman) . 641
Peters, Catherine: *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (Susan Balée). 307
Price, Reynolds: *The Collected Stories* (Tom Wilhelmus) 133
Prunty, Wyatt: *The Run of the House* (Robert McDowell) 154
Rayfiel, Thomas: *Split-Levels* (Thomas Filbin) 648
Rollings, Alane: *The Struggle to Adore* (David Dooley). 673

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Russell, Timothy: *Adversaria* (Robert Schultz) 474
Santos, Sherod: *The City of Women: A Sequence of Poems and Prose* (Robert McDowell) 154
Schuyler, James: *Collected Poems* (Robert McDowell) 154
Sinclair, Iain: *Downriver (Or, The Vessels of Wrath), A Narrative in Twelve Tales* (Tom Wilhelmus) 133
Singer, Irving: *The Pursuit of Love* (Emily Grosholz) 661
Smith, Charlie: *The Palms* (Robert Schultz) 474
Stafford, William: *Selected Poems of William Stafford*, ed. by Robert Bly (David Dooley) 673
Stern, Horst: *The Last Hunt*, trans. by Deborah Lucas Schneider (Gary Krist) 299
Tallent, Elizabeth: *Honey* (Dean Flower) 495
Theroux, Paul: *Millroy the Magician* (Dean Flower) 495
Trevor, William: *Excursions in the Real World: Memoirs* (Gary Krist) 655
Trilling, Diana: *The Beginning of the Journey: The Marriage of Diana and Lionel Trilling* (Sonya Rudikoff) ... 127
Updike, John: *Brazil* (Dean Flower) . 495
Vickers, Brian: *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (William H. Pritchard) 467
Vollmann, William T.: *Butterfly Stories* (Gary Krist) 299
Wayman, Tom: *Did I Miss Anything?: Selected Poems 1973-1993* (James Finn Cotter) 313
Weinberger, Eliot, ed.: *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators & Outsiders* (Robert McDowell) 154
Wheeler, Kate: *Not Where I Started From* (Alan Davis) 141
Wilson, Edmund: *The Sixties* (Joseph Epstein) 235
Woiwode, Larry: *Silent Passengers* (Alan Davis) 141
Ziolkowski, Theodore: *Virgil and the Moderns* (Tess Lewis) 323

VOLUME XLVII

Spring 1994 (No. 1) pages 1–176; Summer 1994 (No. 2) pages 177–336; Autumn 1994 (No. 3) pages 337–512; Winter 1995 (No. 4) pages 513–688

The Poem Itself

Edited with an Introduction by Stanley Burnshaw

Available again for a new generation, this classic work contains over 150 of the greatest modern French, Spanish, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Russian poems presented in the original languages and brilliantly illuminated by English commentaries.

"Stanley Burnshaw has performed an incalculable service to contemporary poetry. Very nearly single-handedly he has forced the door of the future open and made it available."

—James Dickey

$22.00 paper, 1-55728-328-1

ARKANSAS
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS PRESS
McIlroy House ♦ 201 Ozark Avenue ♦ Fayetteville, AR 72701

Call toll free
1-800-626-0090

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The High Road to Taos

Poems by Martin Edmunds

"In the final line of *The Road to Taos*—'your last rays weld the Hudson's bronze doors shut'—Martin Edmunds as always loads every rift with ore. With its compelling cadence, with its command of dense diction, Edmunds's language is a sensuous and sensible joy."
— Donald Hall, from the judge's citation

Selected for the 1994 National Poetry Series by Donald Hall

Paper, $10.95

Winner of a 1994 Whiting Writers' Award
Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award
National Book Award Finalist
Winner of the L.A. Times Book Award in Poetry

My Alexandria

Poems by Mark Doty

Foreword by Philip Levine

"Doty measures how loss comes to bear on hope and the imagination in a time of AIDS. Not merely a book of poems in response to a topical theme, *My Alexandria* is an understated, unflinching look at life in the face of death. The poems are as courageously elegant as the achievement is grand." — *National Book Critics Circle*

Selected for the 1993 National Poetry Series by Philip Levine

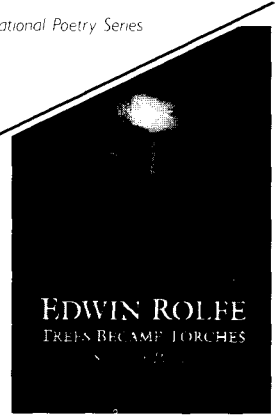
Paper, $10.95

Trees Became Torches

Selected Poems

Edwin Rolfe

Edited by Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks
Introduction and notes on poems by Cary Nelson



"[Rolfe] stands in the forefront of an entire 'lost generation' of left-wing writers who fused artistic craft with irrepressible political commitment." — Alan Wald. Follows the critically acclaimed release of *Edwin Rolfe: Collected Poems*, "An impressive body of work." — *New York Review of Books*

A volume in the American Poetry Recovery Series, edited by Cary Nelson

Paper, $13.95

Illinois

order toll-free 800/545-4703

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS • 1325 South Oak Street • Champaign, IL 61820

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IN THIS ISSUE:

. . . the workshops often allow students to get a high grade with minimum exertion. What better way to compensate for the demands of Organic Chemistry than to twang the lyre? Few teachers give grades lower than B's so long as one produces the negligible amount of work required. The reading burden is minimal, and there are no finals. Further, the actual classes tend to be entertaining, since most workshop instructors are skilled flâneurs, and many even possess the gifts of astrologers and tarot readers, who, from the evidences of a few cards on the table, can flatter their guileless customers into the delusion that they really might be poets.

—Thomas M. Disch, "The Castle of Indolence," p. 521.

Perhaps Auden's insistence upon the nearly infinite human capacity for evil would not have been so objectionable to the intellectuals of his time, were it not for his equally vivid insistence that it does *not* follow that humans are capable of equally great goodness. A consistent theme of Auden's work of this period is that we lack the power to *undo* the evil that we have the power to *do*.

—Alan Jacobs, "Auden's Local Culture," p. 543.

That he [V.S. Naipaul] hasn't yet won the Nobel Prize is continuing matter for speculation and doubtless has to do with his outspoken airings of prejudices that are insufficiently liberal. Reviewing the new book's predecessor, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), Derek Walcott—a Nobel winner—both praised it as writing and deplored Naipaul's disdainful attitudes toward black people and the West Indian world.

—William H. Pritchard, "Naipaul's Written World," p. 587.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED